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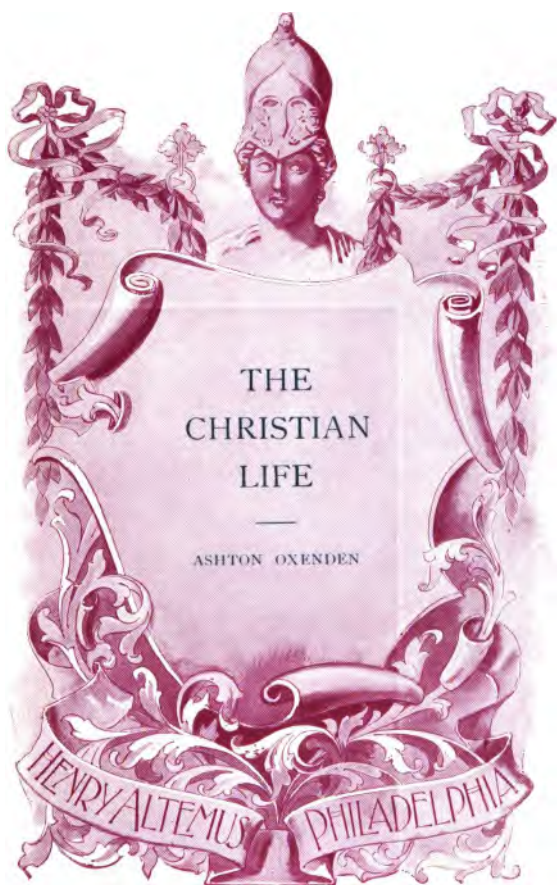
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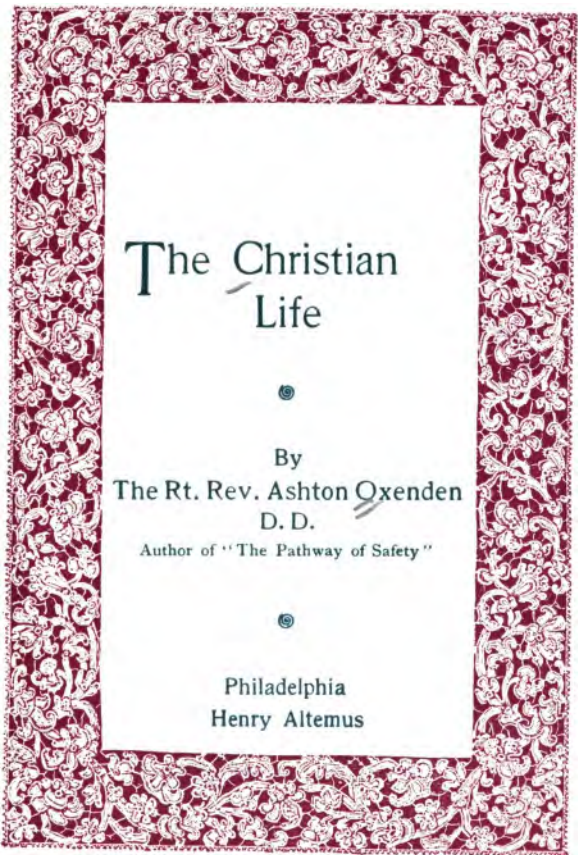
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The Christian Life



By
The Rt. Rev. Ashton Oxenden
D. D.

Author of "The Pathway of Safety"



Philadelphia
Henry Altemus

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THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

LIVING WITHOUT GOD.

How can I live well? and how can I die well? are two of the most important inquiries we can make. I wish every one of my readers was really anxious to have them answered. I wish that every one now taking the Bible in hand felt a real earnest desire to know the way of life, and to walk in it.

Blessed Spirit of God, give us this anxiety. Awaken in us this longing. Give us now thirsting souls, which only Thy truth can satisfy. Bless the writer of this volume. Enable him to speak for Thee. And send none away from the perusal of this book empty and unfed.

"The Christian Life" is a subject of much importance; and I do trust that it may interest you and do you much good.

"The Christian Life"—this is my subject;
(7)

and my first chapter will be on *Living without God*.

St. Paul speaks in his Epistle to the Ephesians of those who have not yet entered on the Christian Life, and have therefore "no hope, and are without God in the world."

Who are these? There were many in his day, and there are many now, living just as he describes, without hope and without God.

The Gospel had only reached Ephesus about ten years before these words were written. Even these very Christians whom he addresses were, a short time before, in all the misery and darkness of heathenism. There was no one to show them the way of salvation. No one in that famous city knew that there was a Saviour, or could give any tidings of that other world to which they were all hastening. But now the light from above had shone upon them: the "Sun of Righteousness" had risen upon them with "healing in his wings."

That was the happiest day that ever dawned upon Ephesus, when Three Strangers made their appearance in its streets, proclaiming the glorious news of salvation.

These were Paul, and his two friends Aquila and Priscilla—Paul the Preacher, and Aquila and Priscilla his helpers.

The Apostle's preaching was greatly blest in that city, and numbers were gathered into the fold of Christ. This then was the little Christian Church, or company of Believers, to whom he afterwards wrote his epistle. In the chapter to which I have alluded he reminds them what their state had once been, and what grace had done for them. "At that time," he says, "ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world."

Now, perhaps some will say, "Thank God, we were never in that state." The words may suit those blind Ephesians; but we, at all events, were never in so godless and hopeless a condition as this.

But in point of fact we were in a worse condition. Yes, you and I were once even worse than they ever were. They were blind, it is true; but we had eyes, and yet would not see. All was light around us; but was there not darkness, gross darkness,

within? They were ignorant of the way of life; we knew it, but did not walk in it. They had never heard of a Saviour: we were baptized in His name. We outwardly belonged to Him; but our hearts were closed against Him.

Was not this the case with all of us once? Is it not the case with many of us now? And if the state of the ignorant heathen, and of the unbelieving Jew, is a sad one, oh, sadder still is the state of the heedless Christian—"having no hope, and without God in the world."

Let us take these two expressions separately; for they are both full of meaning.

"Having no hope?" How is it with the mere nominal Christian? Has he any hope?

Take the first man you meet, and ask him what his hope is. Perhaps he is one who entirely neglects God, a thoroughly irreligious man. But he does not acknowledge that he is altogether without hope. He will say, "I know I am not serving the Lord. My conscience often whispers to me that all is not right. But then I hope to be one day different. It must be indeed a long

lane that has no turning in it. Others have turned, and I hope I shall before I die." Yes, he has a hope. This is his hope—that he will one day come right.

The next person you come across is not a right down bad man; but he is a little thoughtless—rather fond of the world. He will say, "I have wronged no man. I have defrauded no man. I am no one's enemy except perhaps my own. Surely God will not be so strict as He is represented to be. If I do not find mercy, there will be thousands in a worse condition than myself." This is his hope.

You see a third, who is upright, honest, regular, and in every respect well conducted. Not a word was ever whispered against him. He is a kind person, a straightforward man of business, a good master, or a faithful servant. He is a church-goer too—punctual in his place in God's House. His knees are bent in prayer morning and evening. His Bible is read, if not every day, most days at least, when nothing interferes to prevent it. Has not *this man* a hope? Yes, certainly; and what is it? Why, he hopes that as a matter of course all must

be right with him; and that the gate of heaven will be opened to one so worthy.

Each one of these, you see, has a *kind* of hope. And yet what is it worth? In point of fact it is worth *nothing*. It only deceives. It only gives a false peace. It acts as a soothing lotion to the conscience. It is like untempered mortar, which looks well enough when daubed upon the wall; but when the storm comes the wall will fall to pieces. In each of these cases which I have mentioned the hope of the Bible is wanting. Neither of them has a really Christian hope.

Remember, there is such a thing as a *false* hope—a hope that will utterly fail us. We read in the Book of Job, that “the hypocrite’s hope shall perish;” his “trust shall be a spider’s web.” And suppose a man were to trust to a mere spider’s web—suppose a drowning man were to cling to it—would he not be sure to perish? Then, just as surely will those be lost who lean upon such broken reeds as I have described.

But, thank God, there is a hope, better, stronger, and more true than these—a hope which the Apostle speaks of as “sure and

steadfast," like the firmly grounded anchor to which the ship is moored, and then is able to defy the storm.

The Christian's hope is certain. Those are blessed words in our Burial Service—blessed words, when read over the grave of a true Believer, of one who has really died in the Lord—"We therefore commit his body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, *in sure and certain hope* of the resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Yes, the Christian's hope is certain; for it rests, not on what he himself has done, or upon the promise of a fellow-worm, but upon what Christ has done for him, and on the unchangeable word and promise of his God.

You know, I dare say, that in the very centre of the city of London stands the great Cathedral of St. Paul's. The last time I passed by it, a few weeks ago, I saw numbers of people in the street with their eyes directed towards something high up on the steeple. I stopped, and looked also; and there, far aloft, almost out of sight, could be seen a man working in a kind of cradle. It

seemed as though he was in the utmost peril ; but in fact he was secure. It made one giddy to watch him ; but he was quite safe. There was a strong rope to which he was slung, which passed upwards, and entered through a trap-door above him ; and this rope was fastened to a stout beam within. The wind might whistle around him, but he had nothing to fear. He could look upon the dizzy crowd below, but he felt no alarm ; he was safe.

What a picture of the Christian ! In the hour of his greatest weakness, he looks up to heaven and feels that all is secure. *There* is his Father, seated on His eternal throne ! *There* is his Saviour—no longer a suffering, dying Saviour, but a living Saviour, an Almighty Saviour—who has paid the debt, and now rejoices to bless His saved ones. *There* is his anchor, firmly grounded. *There* is his hope, firmly fixed, as the Apostle says, “ within the veil.” And if he clings to this, nothing can ever harm him. Satan may tempt and harass him ; but none can pluck him out of his Father’s hands. Trials may come ; sickness may come ; death may come : but “ underneath are the

everlasting arms," bearing him up. Who can move him from his strong, firm hold? "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who maketh intercession for us."

Ah, but there are thousands in Christian England—numbers whom you yourself know—of whom it may be said, They have no hope.

But now let us look at the *other* expression, "without God in the world." There are very many, who are living in God's world, but seem to forget that *it is* His world, and that He is the great Lord of it.

God is not in their thoughts, in their plans, in their homes, or in their hearts.

He is not in their *Thoughts*. They rise in the morning; say a short prayer, it may be; and then set about the business of the day. They eat their food; but forget the hand that feeds them. The very animals about them put them to shame; for "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his mas-

ter's crib ; but my people, says the Lord, do not consider." They receive mercies ; but they take them as a matter of course, never lifting up their hearts to Him who is the gracious Giver of them. They have continual wants ; but they do not apply to Him who is ever ready to relieve them. Hour after hour passes, without one look, one cry, one desire being raised heavenward.

I ask, Is it not so with some who read this book ? Have there not been many days of our lives, when we have lived as if there was no God above us, and no Saviour near us ? Yes, and even the more serious of us, how often do we forget God ! How *very* few are those moments during the day, when He is foremost and uppermost in our thoughts !

Then, too, God is not in our *Plans*. We are always scheming for our happiness ; some in one way, and some in another. The merchant embarks in a speculation. He lays out his money in the hope of getting a good return for it. The farmer parcels out his land to the best advantage. He sows his fields, and expects to fill his barns. The servant leaves a situation in the hope of

bettering herself. We determine to do this or that to-morrow. We lay our plans for weeks and months to come.

But has God nothing to do with all these arrangements? No, perhaps nothing in *our* view of the matter. We have never consulted Him. We have acted altogether without Him. And yet we cannot move a single step—we cannot succeed in a single instance—without His interference.

It is true, we do succeed oftentimes apparently without His help. He gives us success without our seeking it. But what is that success worth? It is an awful thing to see a godless man prospering—to see him grow richer and richer—to see his flocks and herds increasing—and yet *no blessing with it*. Better is it to have all our plans fail—better to have our schemes fall to the ground—than to prosper, but “without God.”

Think of this, my friend. Begin life anew. Rearrange your plans. “Commit thy way unto the Lord: trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass.” It is right, quite right, to provide for the future. It is right to be “active in business.” But we must also

be "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." Happy the man who takes God into partnership with him; and who desires that every work may be "begun, continued, and ended in Him."

Again, there are some of us who must own that God is not in our *Houses*. Friends are welcome. Visitors are admitted. But He, the *truest* Friend, the *best* Visitor, is shut out. And yet where God is, there is peace—peace in that home, in that family, in those hearts.

It is very painful to go into a house, and feel that there are comforts there: there is everything there that marks care, and attention, and regularity. Perhaps the master and mistress are kind, and civil, and pleasant in their manner. But there is a deficiency in that house. One thing is wanting, and that the chiefest of all. God is not there. Many things are thought of, and many things done; but the "one thing needful" is neglected. Alas! is not this the case with some houses and cottages where we often enter?

Hear what the Lord Himself says, "I will be the God of all the families of Israel,

and they shall be my people." "The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked; but He blesseth the habitation of the just."

Now, whether you are rich or poor, see that God is with you, dwelling with you, taking up His abode in the midst of you. And there is *one thing* that I would earnestly press upon you, and that without delay—if you have not established *Family Prayer* in your household, do so immediately, from this very day. A blessing will come with it. I know it will. For God has declared, "Them that honor me I will honor."

But there is *another* place from which God is often, very often, shut out—from *our hearts*.

There it is that He loves to dwell. "Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy, I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit."

The treasure of the Miser is in his heart. His money may be placed in the bank. It may be hoarded up there, or else put out to interest. But its hateful savor—the taste of it—the miserable love of it—is within

him: his heart is full of it. And so, if our treasure is in heaven, if God is our God, and Christ our Friend, then surely we shall feel His presence in our hearts, comforting us, warming us, filling us with joy and peace and gladness.

Ah, if you are one in whose heart God has no place, you are not happy. I know you cannot be. You may have friends and children to cheer you. You may have bread enough and to spare. The world may smile upon you. But you cannot say, "I am happy." You cannot lift up your heart and say, "Thank God, there is peace, blessed peace, in my soul."

And now a word or two more before the chapter closes.

Ask yourself, Does St. Paul's language describe *me*? Is it possible that *I* can have been living hitherto "without God," and that if I die it will be "without hope?"

Think what it is to LIVE *without God*—to feel that He is at a distance from you—that He is your God, and yet you have nothing to do with Him. Oh tremble to live another hour, another moment, without Him. Do

not dare to begin another day without asking Him to be with you, to guide, and direct, and keep, and bless you. Do not dare to lay your head upon your pillow another night, without asking Him who is the Keeper of Israel to be your Keeper. Say to yourself, "From this day I will begin a new life. God shall be my God. I will yield myself up to Him."

And think also what it is to DIE *without hope*. In that lonely, solitary hour, when heart and flesh fail—when the world is melting away from under us—when friends cannot help us, and thousands of gold and silver, if we had them, could give us no consolation—when life is ebbing fast, and death draws nearer, and eternity lies outspread before us—then to have no hope, no Father's arm to support us, no Saviour to cling to as our refuge—who can tell the misery of this? Oh that it may not be so with you! Oh that you may "turn to the stronghold," as a "prisoner of hope!" Oh that you may flee to Christ to-day, before the night comes, when He will be shut out from us for ever!

May the Lord Himself speak to some

heart which He has never reached before !
May He send His grace into that heart !
May He disturb you, if you are asleep ! May
He prick your conscience, if it is dull ! May
He never leave you till you have heartily
entered upon that new and *Christian Life*,
of which I shall speak to you in the next
chapter.

CHAPTER II.

THE TURNING-POINT IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

LET me begin by saying a word or two about the subject which has already been brought before you in the last chapter—*Living without hope, and without God in the world.* A fearful subject! And if it has left any impression of your heart, I am very thankful for it. If I spoke strongly it was because I felt strongly. And if I seemed to deal harshly with you, it was because I wish faithfully to tell you the truth; and because, much as I desire your favor, I desire far more to win your soul.

Thank God, there is a *Turning-point* in the career of many of us. Thank God, there is a time with many of us, when we turn out of the broad path of the world, and heartily endeavor to walk in the narrow way of God. Though we never see the tawny Ethiopian change his skin, or the mottled leopard his spots, blessed be God,

we do sometimes see a change wrought in men's hearts—a thorough, real, vital change.

This is spoken of in Scripture under different names. It is called a *Quickening*: God is said to quicken, or give new life to our souls. It is called also a *New birth*: the sinner becomes so entirely altered, that he is as one born again. Sometimes too it is called *Conversion*: this describes the turning of the whole man to God—the yielding up the sinful, wayward, worldly heart to His service.

This is the thing which I am now going to speak about, and which I have called “*The Turning-point* in the Christian Life.” God give His blessing while we dwell upon it!

Now, it may be asked, Were we not all brought into Christ's service by Baptism? Were we not *then* introduced into God's family? Did we not *then* make our entrance into the Christian Life?

Baptism is the door into Christ's kingdom on earth. It is the blessed ordinance, by which His little ones are stamped and marked as the sheep of His fold. They

are brought into covenant with Him. They are solemnly placed under the shelter of His care. They are no longer like neglected shrubs in the desert, but are planted in the garden of the Lord. They now become "members of Christ, children of God, and heirs of heaven."

But what has been the history of most of us since our Baptism? How few of us, like St. John, have been "filled with the Holy Ghost, even from our mother's womb!" How few of us, like him, have led an almost unbroken life of holiness! Have we not, like silly sheep, wandered and strayed from the fold? And although, through God's infinite mercy, He still regards us as His children, yet, if we had our deserts, we should long ago have been disinherited and cut off for ever.

Here then we see the need of conversion—that blessed *Turning-point* when a man begins to act for Christ, and to live for Christ, in the world. Baptism is the Door of Admission into the Christian Life; but our hearts need to be converted before we can be said fairly to live this new life. By Baptism we are set, as it were,

in the path ; but at our conversion we actually begin to walk in it with our faces Zion-wards.

Believe me, we all need this—every one of us. And does not our Lord Himself say to us, “ Except ye be converted, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven ? ”

The *Reckless, Ungodly Sinner* needs it. He must leave the sin in which he is wallowing, and “ cleanse himself from all filthiness of flesh and spirit.”

The *Worldly Man* needs it. The love of the world must die in him, and a better love, even the love of God, must spring up within him. He must declare plainly that he seeks a better country.

The mere *Nominal Christian* needs it : for it is one thing to have “ a name that he liveth,” and quite another to give his life, his heart, his whole self, to God’s service.

Yes, we all need it ; for until our hearts are changed, we cannot love God. The Christian path will be all uphill to us. We can neither enjoy God’s service here, nor be fitted for the happiness of heaven.

In the Parable of the Prodigal Son a

most touching picture is drawn—a full-length portrait of thousands now on earth, and of tens of thousands now in glory. If I wanted to show a sinner his complete wretchedness and misery, I should use that parable. If I wanted to touch his hard heart, and bring him on his knees before God, I should use that parable. If I wanted to show him that he has still a Father in heaven, and that that Father loves him with a tenderness which only a father can feel, I should use that parable. Again, if I wanted to prove to him that, bad as he is, and far as he has wandered, there is a return, a way back—that pardon is not beyond his reach—that the gate of mercy is open even for him—I should read to him those simple words of Jesus. And truly from no other lips did sounds of mercy like those ever come. “Never man spake like this Man.” Never did such loving, gracious, winning words drop from any mouth, as the words of that parable, which the youngest child may understand, and from which the aged penitent may take comfort.

But I am not going to dwell now on the parable; but merely on that one point in it,

where it is said that the son, who had left his father's house, just as *we* have left ours—had sought happiness afar from him, as *we* have done, and found it not—at length “came to himself;” reflected on his misery; remembered that the very servants in his once happy home were highly favored, compared with himself in his present degraded state; and at once resolved to go and cast himself at his father's feet. This was his condition, and these words beautifully describe it, “He came to himself.” The expression is familiar to us all.

When, for instance, any one has been sleeping, and you suddenly rouse him, he starts up, stares about him for a moment or two, and then you say, *He is come to himself.*

When a person has been long ill, and his illness takes a favorable turn, and he begins to recover, you say of him that he is *himself again.*

When a fellow-creature loses his reason—when his mind fails, and the foolishness of a little child comes over him—when such an one is mercifully restored, we speak of that man as once more *coming to himself.*

And what can better describe that moment—that happy moment—that eventful moment in our history—(and oh, that there may be just such a moment in your history!) when the soul which has been long asleep awakes, when the soul which has been long diseased rises up and recovers itself, when the soul which has been given up to madness feels that folly must have an end? What, I say, can better describe this state, this *Turning-point*, than those few simple words, “He came to himself?”

Now, if you and I *have come to ourselves*, how has it been effected? Or, if we are *ever to come to ourselves*, how will it be effected?

The heart cannot change *itself*, any more than the dry barren soil can, if let alone, become fertile; or the wild crab-apple of its own accord bear delicious fruit.

Neither can man change the heart of his fellow-man. God may use men as His instruments, but they are *only instruments* in His hands. An able preacher may arrest attention. He may draw tears from eyes that never wept before. He may send his hearers away thoughtful. But *conversion*

is beyond his power. St. Paul never of himself converted a single soul. St. Peter was not the renewer of one heart on the day of Pentecost.

No, the power is God's. The work is His. "Of *His own will* begat He us with the word of truth." "As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but *of God.*"

You come to church. Some word strikes you. You feel as you never before felt. You go away to live a new life.

Or you are seized with a fit of illness. You are laid aside in your sick room. And in the stillness of that silent chamber thoughts of the past and the future come over you. You feel that you have not lived to Christ; and you feel unfit, most unfit, to die. From that hour you become an altered person.

Or a good book falls in your way. You take it up carelessly. But that book perhaps has an arrow in it which pierces your very soul.

Or you receive a visit from a pious

friend. You asked him to your house, because you thought his company would give you pleasure. But there is One who sent him to you for a far different purpose; namely, to lead you by his words and his example into the blessed path of peace.

By one or other of these means you have become religious. Still, it was neither the *Sermon*, nor the *Illness*, nor the *Book*, nor the *Friend*, that wrought the wondrous change. There was a Mighty One at work. It was "the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes."

I have said that this change is *absolutely necessary*, and that it is the *work of God Himself*. Bear these two points in mind, and reflect upon them, for they are most important.

But there are three other points connected with this subject, which, though not *so* important, are still deeply interesting.

One is, Whether the change we have been speaking of is *sudden*, or *gradual*. Some will not believe in sudden conversions, and others again take little note of any that are *not* sudden. Let us look

into the Bible, and then judge for ourselves.

Saul's change was *sudden*. He was stopped in a moment, in the very midst of his fearful opposition to the Saviour, and at once became a devoted follower of Christ.

The Philippian jailor's conversion again was *sudden*. A deep conviction of his guilt flashed across his mind, and he fell down at the Apostle's feet an inquiring penitent, and an earnest believer.

On the other hand, take the case of the Ethiopian Eunuch. His conversion was *gradual*. He goes to Jerusalem, and there probably he hears for the first time the glad tidings of salvation. He is led to search the Scriptures. He becomes an anxious inquirer after the truth. Then, as he journeys homeward, Philip meets him by the way—not accidentally, but by the Lord's direction—and under his teaching, his mind is further enlightened, and he is enabled to see and lay hold of the great gospel hope; “and goes on his way rejoicing.”

Or, to mention another case of *gradual* conversion, Apollos, of whom we read in the eighteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apos-

tles, becomes impressed with religion, probably in his own native city Alexandria. For a while he gropes his way in the dark. He is fervent in spirit, and anxious to embrace the faith of Christ. But as yet there is only a glimmering of light in him. Something brings him to Ephesus. And there he meets with two earnest-minded disciples; and with their help he gets to know the way of the Lord more perfectly, and becomes at length a burning and shining light in the Church of Christ.

And so it is now. Those, who are brought to God by the power of His grace, are brought in various ways. He is not tied and bound by any special rules. Some are called into His service as by a miracle. The change is sudden and striking. They pass rapidly from darkness to light, from sin to holiness. They are snatched by Almighty power as brands from the burning. The Holy Spirit at once convinces them of sin, and leads them to Christ; and they forthwith set out on their way to heaven.

Others receive religious impressions; but they are slight. The world creeps in perhaps, and smothers for a while the spark

which God with His own hand has kindled. The fire is lighted; but it burns slowly; and perhaps it is a long while before it bursts into a steady flame. There is grace in that soul; but it is not very marked. Still it is real grace, and by degrees it shows itself more fully. The person becomes gradually more and more enlightened, more in earnest, more decided.

So, you see, God is pleased sometimes to bring souls into His kingdom by a special act of grace—suddenly and instantaneously. And at other times He sees fit to carry on His blessed work in the soul—the very same work—but by a slower and more gradual process.

Another interesting question is this—Does a truly changed person always know *when*, and *how*, the change in him took place?

Some, doubtless, can confidently point to the exact circumstances which first led them to think seriously. God's dealing with them was so clear; the occasion was so marked; that they have no hesitation in saying, "It was the sermon that I heard—it was that quiet time in my sick chamber—

it was those words spoken by my friend—or it was when reading that verse of Scripture—or when kneeling down in secret prayer—then it was that God in His mercy first touched my heart, showed me to myself as a sinner, and led me to the Saviour. I can remember it with thankfulness, as the sailor remembers his deliverance from shipwreck." Saul could never in after years have doubted that that eventful journey to Damascus was *the Turning-point* in his career. And Manasseh could without hesitation point to Babylon, and say, "It was there, in the hour of my affliction, that God first made Himself known to me. It was there I learnt the misery of sin, and the way of deliverance from it."

But there are hundreds and thousands of others, just as truly and savingly converted to God, who know not how it was, or when it was, that the seed of grace sprung up within them. All they can say is, "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind now I see."

After all, the chief matter about which we need to be anxious is not the hour, or the place, or the manner, in which the

change has been wrought, but *the fact* itself. Has such a change taken place in me? Am I very different from what I once was?

There is one more point, which I dare not leave unnoticed. There is a change in the history of some, not for the better, but *for the worse*. There is a Turning-point, when they begin to go back rather than forward—when the heart, which has been once warm, grows cold—when the taste for God's word and prayer grows feeble—when temptations are listened to, which once they would have blushed to mention. They change, but like "seducers," they "wax worse and worse." The night grows darker and darker. The edge of conscience becomes duller and duller. Sin is welcomed, and God forsaken.

Oh, let us beware of this. For the Spirit of God, once grieved, will not readily return. It is hard, very hard, to roll back the falling stone; or to turn the stream which has burst through its appointed channel.

Pray earnestly that, if you have never felt the working of God's grace in your

heart, you may feel it now ; and that, if the work is already begun, it may be carried on within you.

If there is only the beginning of good things in your soul—if there is but a feeling of earnestness, ever so slight—if there is a waking up to the great realities of eternity—if there is a desire, however faint, to live for heaven—may He, who “despises not the day of small things,” help you on your way ! May He, who knows your difficulties better than I do, bring you through them all ; and enable you from this time to stand forward as a heaven-bound traveller, as one whose heart is bent on reaching a better home !

CHAPTER III.

CHRIST THE LIFE OF THE SOUL.

I SPOKE in the last chapter of God's converting power—of a soul being *quicken*ed or *new-born* by His grace. Now, where does the living soul find strength? From whence come its supplies? How does the new-born man live?

In himself he is powerless. Within all is emptiness. He has been awakened, it is true; but he will fall back into sleep again.

He has been raised as it were from the dead; but death will soon seize him again, if he has no life, but that which springs up from within himself.

Let us see how it was with St. Paul after his conversion. Hear what he says in his own case, "I live, yet not I, but *Christ liveth in me.*" Hear what St. John says, "He that hath the Son *hath life*; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." And now let us hear what Christ Himself says,

"I am *the Life*," "the Resurrection and *the Life*;" "the Way, the Truth, and *the Life*."
"Because I live, ye shall live also."

Christ then is the Life of the renewed soul.

Look at one of those trees which casts its shade so pleasantly along our path. In summer how fresh and vigorous are its branches! And even in the dreary season of winter, when every bough seems dead, if you cut one, you will soon see there is life in it. Why? Because there is life and vigor in the stem.

Or look at one of those strong steady arms that holds the plough, or fells the oak. Whence comes the power, the activity, the strength? It comes from the body, in which there is life and health. What would the branch be if cut off from the tree? What could the arm do if severed from the body?

And so it is union with Christ, living upon Christ, that can alone make us growing, thriving, vigorous Christians.

But do we not declare, in one of our Creeds, that the Holy Spirit is the great Life-giver to the soul? "I believe in the Holy Ghost, *the Lord and Giver of Life!*"

Yes, the gift is made over to us by Him. He it is who makes the heart to feel its utter deadness; and then leads us to the Saviour for life and help.

To know Christ then, to be looking to Christ, to be constantly stretching out the hand and heart to Christ, to be daily feeding upon Him, to be joined to Him by faith, this is the secret of all our spiritual life, and of all our spiritual well-being.

But let us for a few minutes consider what is the history of a person who has been brought under the influence of God's grace. Does he find Christ, and live upon Christ, *at once*? Is it a thing that he comes to *immediately*, and without any difficulty? Oh, no! The Holy Spirit usually begins His work by first showing us that we need a Saviour. Do not mistake me: I would not for a moment have you suppose that God *always* works precisely in this way. He has many ways of bringing us to Christ. But this is perhaps His *usual* way of dealing with a soul. He first lifts up the veil, and shows us what we are. He discovers to us, what we could never have discovered

ourselves, the sinfulness of sin. We knew before that sin was an evil. When we saw it openly committed we condemned it. And when we were invited to commit it ourselves, we at once shrank back. The life we led was outwardly correct perhaps. We did about as well as our neighbors, and that was enough for us. But we knew nothing of the sin that was all the while lying deep down in our hearts. Our guilt had not been brought home to us. We had no feeling of uneasiness.

But at length God in mercy opened our eyes, and stuck His arrow in our hearts. And *then* how differently did we feel! *Then* we saw that the life we had been living was a useless, profitless one—and more than this, that it was a sinful one. We saw that our prayers had been no prayers at all; that our reading of Scripture had been a mere form; that our church-going had been a task and a toil; that God was an unknown God to us; that Christ was not really loved by us—in short, that we had been living for the world and not for heaven, for time and not for eternity.

Oh, what a discovery! What a fearful

discovery, you will say! Rather, what a blessed discovery—to know our danger and find it out in time to get deliverance!

It often happens, that for a season a man *remains* in this state. He feels himself to be a sinner. The thought of his sins is ever before him. It rests upon him, just as a black leaden cloud sometimes hangs over us, and seems to linger in the sky above our heads. He is unhappy, very unhappy. He looks perhaps to the world to cheer him; but the world can do nothing for him. He feels its emptiness, its poverty. He sighs for peace. He looks for it in himself, but it is not there. He seeks in vain for deliverance. Ah, the wilderness seems bleak. The road seems very rough and difficult. The burden he is carrying is very heavy. He truly feels the need of salvation, and is anxious and eager to do anything to secure it. He tries perhaps all sorts of expedients, except the only true one.

Why does he not throw himself upon Christ? Why does he not rise and go to his Father and acknowledge his guilt? He dares not go perhaps, because he has so greatly offended that Father; and he knows

not that He is a Father of mercies, and a God of love.

Why then does he not go to his Minister, and open his grief to him? Why does he not tell him of his troubles, and seek counsel of him? How gladly would he comfort him! How gladly would he lend an ear to all his difficulties, and perhaps point out a way of deliverance from them! But, it may be, he thinks that his case is different from any other case—that no one can feel just as he feels. And so he shrinks from laying bare his heart to any fellow-creature, and hides from every eye the deep, aching wound within him.

I can fancy a person coming to church with his heart thus broken. I can fancy how differently he would feel from many, when the minister says, "Let us *pray*." Prayer would be a reality with him. Ah, he would kneel down, and open his very heart to God. Once he was content to sit at his ease: there was no penitence then, no self-abhorrence then; but now he feels that he can but fall upon his knees: it is the fitting posture for a heart-stricken sinner. And where can he find words more suited

to his case, than those touching words with which we approach God in our Public Worship? "Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from Thy ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against Thy holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; and we have done those things which we ought not to have done. And there is no health in us." Even this language is not too strong for him. He feels that there is literally "no health" in him. And then those words that follow—how eagerly does he utter them! "But Thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable sinners. Spare Thou them, O God, which confess their faults. Restore Thou them that are penitent."

Truly this is a golden prayer for a penitent soul. And that other too, in which we address God as One "whose nature and property is ever to have mercy and to forgive," is equally suitable to his state. And "though we be tied and bound with the chain of our sins," yet we entreat Him to "let the pitifulness" (this is the language of

one who feels that he has no plea to urge, but must throw himself on the compassion of his God)—we entreat Him to “let the *pitifulness* of His great mercy loose us.”

I thank God that we have such prayers as these, and that we belong to a Church, which like a tender mother puts such earnest, lowly words into the lips of her children.

This stage of Christian experience, which I have described, is painful while it lasts. But it is good for us to have our proud hearts bruised and broken by the Holy Spirit’s influence. And He never leaves a soul long in this state. In time the relief comes. “Sorrow may endure for a night”—aye, and the night may be long and dark—“but joy cometh in the morning.” We learn to our comfort that there is mercy for the lost, pardon for the guilty, rest for the weary—that Christ is the sinner’s Remedy, and the sinner’s Friend—that He is “the Fountain opened for sin and uncleanness;” and that in Him there is “redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of our sins.”

But here again another difficulty often

springs up. How can I get to this Saviour? Will He hear me? Will He not reject me? Am I not too vile? Are not my sins too great, and of too long standing? Have I repented enough? Have I mourned enough? The Saviour has received others; but will He receive *me*?

Such seems to be the state of mind described in the Third Chapter of the Book of Canticles. In the first two verses a seeking soul is described—a seeker who has not yet found the Saviour—one who is on the search, but has not yet discovered the pearl of great price: “By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth. I sought him, but I found him not.” With the utmost anxiety and eagerness is this search carried on: “I will rise now, and go about the city; in the streets and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth. I sought him, but I found him not.” Again and again the mournful complaint is repeated, “I sought him, but found him not.”

In the third verse, the watchmen or ministers are described as finding the earnest inquirer, and helping him in his distress: “The watchmen that go about the city found

me ; to whom I said, Saw ye Him whom my soul loveth ? ”

And then in the fourth verse, we see that promise fulfilled, “Ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and ye shall find.” For the inquirer exclaims in the joy of his heart, “It was but a little that I passed from them, but *I found Him whom my soul loveth.*”

Who can describe the joy of having found Christ? Blessed is the *seeker* after Him. “Let the heart of them rejoice that *seek* the Lord.” But still more blessed are those who have *found* Him—who can say, “My beloved is mine, and I am His.”

What a thought it is to be pardoned of all one’s sins ! to look upon God now as a loving Father ! to see in Christ a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice for every past transgression.

But is this *all* ? Is pardon *all* we need ? Are the words, “Thy sins be forgiven thee,” all we want to hear ? This is much, very much. But the forgiven sinner has now to travel along a new and heavenly road. He has been delivered from “the low dungeon.” His fetters have been struck off from him. He has been “brought out of the horrible

pit." He has been cleansed from "the miry clay." He has been raised from the very dead: his grave-clothes have been stripped off. And now he has a new life before him—very different from his past life—a life of usefulness, a life of holiness, aye, and a life of happiness.

He now needs the same Saviour who pardoned him, to be ever with him, to help him on his way, to keep his soul alive. As he has "*received* Christ Jesus," so he must now "*walk* in Him." He must run his Christian race, "looking unto Jesus." He must "come out of the wilderness, leaning on his beloved."

We are apt to think that all we need is to look to Christ as our Sin-bearer; and that, having once gone to Him in faith, and obtained forgiveness, the work is done.

What! is sin gone then for ever? Does the Believer need no fresh renewal of the grant of pardon? Yes, he needs it daily, hourly. Then let us be continually looking to the Saviour. Our place should be constantly at the foot of the cross, seeking to have our sins again and again washed away in the Redeemer's blood.

Does not the Believer also need strength? He cannot fight by his own power. He cannot even *walk* alone. If he hopes to resist temptation, and to lead a holy life of service to his heavenly Master—if he wants boldly to come out from the world, and to stand forth as a decided follower of Christ—he must look to Jesus for daily grace to strengthen him.

Never suppose that you can become strong enough to do without Christ. Never fancy that you can reach such a point, that you are anything more than a poor, helpless being in your Saviour's eyes. As you humbled yourself beneath His cross at the first, so continue to feel your place to be in the dust before Him, your righteousness to be as filthy rags, your strength as utter weakness.

Be confident *in Him*; not in yourself. Trust *in Him*; not in your own attainment. Look upon Him as your all, *as the Life of your soul*. Go to Him in your emptiness, and receive daily out of *His fulness*.

Let me ask you, Do you truly love

Christ? Is there a moving of your heart towards Him? Is He precious to your soul?

Many *think* they love Him. They mention Him with respect. They have a feeling in their minds that, in some way or other, they are better off than if there was no Saviour. But yet they cannot say that they do indeed love Him. They cannot exclaim with the Psalmist, "There is none upon earth that I desire in comparison with Thee." They hold no intercourse with Him. He is in truth as a stranger to their souls.

How different is this from the experience of a real child of God! He feels towards his Saviour as he feels towards none else. His language is, "Who shall separate me from the love of Christ?" "He loved me, and gave Himself for me."

Again, have you *found* Christ? Happy those who, under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, have been enabled to lay hold of Him, and are rejoicing in His salvation; who have made their choice, and taken Him as their portion! They are ready to say, "Blessed be that grace, which subdued my unwilling heart, and drew me to my Saviour;

which conquered my love of the world, and won me over to Christ."

"O happy day that fixed my choice
On Thee, my Saviour and my God!
Well may this glowing heart rejoice,
And tell its rapture all abroad."

But, if I mistake not, there are some who, although they cannot quite say this, yet are on the fair way to it. And so it may be with you. You have not *found* Christ, but you are earnestly *seeking* Him. A desire has sprung up in your heart which earthly things cannot satisfy—a desire which comes, not from yourself, but from God—a desire which savors not of nature, but of grace.

If this desire has a place within you, I thank God for it. And I pray that it may never leave you; but may grow stronger and stronger within you, until you also can say, "I have found Him whom my soul loveth."

CHAPTER IV.

LIVING TO GOD.

ABOUT three miles from this there stands a building which has lately been erected with some care, and is just roofed in. That building is a little Church, where I trust in a few weeks a congregation of worshippers will be gathered.

What makes it a Church? Not the spot on which it is erected; for it stands on a rough, uncultivated heath. Not the materials of which it is built; for it is built of stone, and brick, and wood, of which ordinary houses are composed. But it will one day be a Church; because it will be *solemnly set apart* for the worship and service of God. It has been built with that intention, and will be used for that purpose.

So it is with the Christian. He is one *set apart* for God. "The Lord hath set apart him that is godly for Himself." The name of God is written, as it were, "in his forehead."

He is "a temple of the Holy Ghost." He has given himself to the Lord. This was just what St. Paul felt, when he said, "Ye are not your own ; for ye are bought with a price : therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." Once he thought he was at liberty to go his own way and to do his own will. But God had wrought a wondrous change in him. He had tasted of pardoning mercy. He had been brought under the influence of grace. He had learnt the preciousness of Christ, and had thankfully embraced His salvation. And now he felt he was Christ's property, Christ's servant, a vessel naturally worthless, but mercifully "fitted for the Master's use." Speaking therefore of himself and his brethren, he says, "None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord ; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord ; whether we live therefore or die, we are the Lord's."

I spoke to you in the first chapter about *living without God*. God forbid that any one of us should be living thus !

I spoke to you in my next chapter about

turning to God. God grant that many of us have turned to Him—may have taken the first decisive step towards a better course!

And now let us give our best thoughts to the subject of the present chapter—*Living to God.* I shall take these three points—

How can we live to God?

Why should we live to God? and

When should we live to Him?

I. *How* can we live to God?

We must live a *different life* from that of ordinary men. The little Church I spoke of stands amidst other houses; but yet it must not be considered as a common building. And so, if we would be God's people, we must feel differently, and act differently, from many around us. We none of us *wish* to be singular. We would not court observation. But a really God-fearing person is forced to take a line somewhat different from many about him. This is sometimes very painful; but it cannot be avoided.

A pious *Child* in a family, for instance, wishes to serve the Saviour. And yet perhaps no one in the house feels as he feels. He meets with no encouragement, it

may be—no sympathy—none to join him and help him in his happy, blessed course. This makes his way a very difficult one. Still he must be faithful to Christ, cost him what it may.

A *Servant* may stand almost alone among his fellow-servants. *They* may be for the world: *he* is for God. *They* are thinking how they may get on in life: *he* is anxious to get to heaven. His feelings then and his actions must needs be very different from others. He has no *wish* to be singular; but he *must* be, or else deny his Lord.

In a school, or in a house, or in a village, it is soon known who are the serious ones, who are the soldiers of Christ, and the candidates for heaven. Their conduct, their lives, their words soon tell the tale. Yes, depend upon it, those who were Christ's disciples in former times were very unlike the careless ones around them. They were each one as a "light" in the world, as "a city set on a hill that cannot be hid."

And so it must be now. We cannot creep along the road to heaven unobserved. We cannot be on the Lord's side, and yet pass unnoticed in the crowd. We cannot be

Christ's disciples, without being liable to the charge brought against Peter, "Surely thou art also one of them: thy speech bewrayeth thee."

Be prepared then, if you are the friend and follower of Christ, to take the line marked out for you in God's word, though it may be the very opposite to that which others are following.

Further, there must be *a separation from the world.*

God's children are *in* the world, but are not *of* the world.

They are *in the world*, and therefore He would have them engage in its employments, discharge its duties, and take part in its occupations. In the seventeenth chapter of St. John, we find our Lord thus interceding for His people: "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil."

The religious *Laborer* may labor still; and all the more heartily, because he is in the way of duty.

The religious *Tradesman* may still stand

behind his counter, but there will be no underhand dealing, no leaded weights or shortened measures, but all his business will be done in the fear of God. It must and will be so, if he is a Christian man.

The religious *Farmer* too will still cultivate his land, still exercise the same watchful care, still exert the same industry and forethought. But he will do it in a different spirit. Whilst he sows the seed, or looks after his flock, he will remember from whence cometh the increase. His eye will be often turned to Him who can alone give the blessing.

The child of God is not *of* the world. He has lost his greediness for its pleasures: for he has tasted of something better. He has lost his eager desire for gain; for he has won a prize, which exceeds all earthly treasures. He has lost his love for worldly company; for he has now a new and better Friend than this world ever gave him.

The Christian is called to give up the world: that is, all that is sinful, all that is frivolous, all that draws away the heart from God.

You will say perhaps, Give us then some

rule that we may follow, as to *what* we must give up. I cannot do it. No one can. Your own conscience must be your guide. The feelings of your own heart must sway you. The only thing like a rule which I can give you is this—and if you follow it, you will not be far wrong—"Do nothing on which you cannot kneel down and ask God's blessing. Go nowhere, where you would not wish Christ to find you." I repeat it; for I feel that it may be useful to you through life: "Do nothing, on which you cannot kneel down and ask God's blessing. Go nowhere, where you would not wish Christ to find you."

But I must go further, and say, that as regards our worldly *occupations* which are right in themselves, we must not follow them, so as to give our whole hearts and souls to them. Important as they are, there is something *more* important. Whilst many put earth's engagements above the call of God—whilst they are saying in their hearts, "Business, be thou my god; I devote myself to thee,"—let our language be, "This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are

before, I press towards the mark. I seek *first* the kingdom of God."

It is quite clear from Scripture that we are required, and solemnly called upon as Christians, to give up the world. "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." "The friendship of the world is enmity with God." "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will be a Father unto you."

Again, we must *deny ourselves* for the Lord's sake.

The Christian is called upon sometimes to do what is contrary to his own inclinations. He must learn then to deny himself. He must no longer do things, merely because they square with his own will, but because the Lord would have him do them. The faithful service of God often brings us into trouble. We often have to bear much, for His sake. We often have to act in a way that flesh and blood would shrink from. But shall we not do what our Heavenly Father bids us do? Shall we not bear what He sees well to lay upon us? Yes, and

even rejoice in doing it ; and thankfully and cheerfully bear it, at His bidding.

When our own evil hearts then are ready to turn away from the task, or quake with fear, let us remember Him who said, "If any man will come after me, let him *deny himself*, take up his cross, and follow me."

There must also be a bold, hearty, decided *surrender of ourselves* to the Lord.

There can be no *living to God*, where there is half-heartedness, wavering, or indecision. We must fearlessly face the world, and declare ourselves for Christ. There must be no hanging back, no fear of man's displeasure, no truckling to this person's arguments, or that person's fancies. Christ bids us come boldly forward as His servants, and we dare not hang back.

Ah, here is the trial. I know how difficult it is to take so strong and decided a step. And yet I am sure that thousands lose their peace of mind—lose God's favor—aye, and lose heaven too—for want of taking it.

I wish I could persuade you this day to leave the ranks of indifference, of indecision

—may I not say, the ranks of cowardice? for I know that the conscience of more than one of you is now whispering, “I *ought* to yield myself up at once to God.” I wish I could persuade you at this moment boldly and fearlessly to declare yourself for Christ, and to cast in your life with His people.

May the Lord Himself “draw you with the cords of a man, with the bands of love!”

Lastly, we must *live a life of faith*.

“We” (St. Paul says), “we Christians walk by faith, not by sight.” “We look not at the things which are seen and are temporal, but at the things which are not seen and are eternal.”

If your treasure is here, labor for it night and day; strive for it, as for a prize; grasp it with all eagerness. But if you wish for that better portion, which is promised you, and is yet to come, pray for it, seek for it, live for it.

I trust you *at times* long for that better portion. There is a Friend for you above, out of sight, “whom having not seen” you may “love.” There is an Almighty Arm ready to shelter you: place yourself under

its care. There is a Home before you—an eternal home: be ever looking towards it with the unwavering eye of faith.

This, I believe, is what Scripture means by “living unto the Lord”—a different life from that of others; a separation from the world; a denying of ourselves for Christ’s sake; a bold surrender of ourselves to the Lord; a life of faith.

Oh, that God may give us grace to choose such a life as this; and having chosen it, never to waver in our choice!

There are two other inquiries, which I shall touch upon very briefly.

Why should we thus live to God? We are not our own, but His. He made us. He preserves us. We are in His hands. To Him we owe our strength, our health, our lives. But still more, we owe to Him our *salvation*. He loved us, and sent His Son to die for us. We have been bought by His precious blood. “He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him.” That Church on the heath, of which I spoke just

now, is no longer man's property ; it is God's house. And so the Christian is not his own, but the Lord's. He has consecrated himself to the Lord's service.

If we felt this more—"I am not my own, but Christ's—not my own, to live for myself, but Christ's, to live for Him"—then how differently should we feel and act! Our life would be one entire consecration to our Master's service. Our constant inquiry would be, "How can I please Him? How can I do His will? How can I glorify Him in my body, and in my spirit, which are His?"

Remember, He who is your great Creator, to whom you owe your very life—your Protector, who has guarded you up to this hour—your Father, who so tenderly loves you—*He* says to you, Give Me—not your money, not your health, not your strength, not your words—but give Me something in which I am more interested still ; my son, give Me *thy heart*. And can you refuse to give it?

He who is your Saviour too, who has loved you as no brother ever loved you ; who has stretched Himself on the cross for you ; who has drunk the bitter cup of suffering for your sake ; He says, "I stand at the

door and knock." Oh, will you not let Him in? Will you not say, "Other lords beside Thee have had dominion over me; but I desire henceforth to give my heart, my life, myself, to Thee."

And now, a word or two on the question, *When* shall we live unto God?

To this I answer without hesitation, Now, to-day, this very hour. The time past of our lives sufficeth to have lived to ourselves and to the world. Now begin to live to God. Why not?

What! Would you have young men and women, just entering on the joys of life, give themselves to God? Would you have those who are in health and strength, with probably a long life before them—would you have *them* turn their backs on the world and enter upon Christ's service? Yes, certainly I would.

We cannot too soon begin a life of such joy and blessedness. Why not? Are the world's bonds too strong to break? Is self too dear to be given up? Is the heart so fondly set on things below? Has it clung to them so long that it is unwilling to break

away from them now, and enjoy those better things which God has to give? Oh, take care lest death comes and finds us living—I will not say a sinful life—but a selfish, unprofitable, worldly life.

I feel that the great end of this book will not be gained, unless it leads you to stand out from the world, and to be really anxious to lead godly and heavenly lives.

I am thankful if you are quiet and respectable; if you go to church, and sometimes to the Holy Table. But I want more. I want to see sin forsaken, Jesus my Saviour loved and honored. I want to see you crowding into the narrow way—pressing onward with a firm and joyous step. I want to see you asking the way to Zion with your face thitherward, determined by God's help to live as an earnest, faithful, and consistent follower of Christ.

God grant that you may one day—ah, this day—take up the language of the Apostle, and say, “Whether I live I will live unto the Lord: and whether I die I will die unto the Lord: whether living therefore or dying, I will be the Lord's.”

CHAPTER V.

THE GREAT WORK OF LIFE.

OUR Lord's life on earth was the great pattern life. Even in the days of His childhood, He worked for His heavenly Father. Those early years were spent with His earthly Parents principally at Nazareth. Picture to yourself a Child, much like other children, year by year growing in wisdom and in stature; strictly following the wishes of Joseph and Mary; working at their trade, as "the Carpenter's Son;" a sinless Child, a pattern of holiness, and perfectly pure in heart and life.

At the age of twelve, His Parents took Him with them, to attend the great Feast of the Passover, according to the custom of the Jews. It was usual on those occasions for several families to join together for safety, and to travel in company. Those Passover days must have been happy and solemn seasons; for there was much in them to re-

mind the people of God of His past goodness to them, and of mercies yet to come.

The Feast being ended, the different companies gather together, and leave the city with their faces turned again towards their respective homes. The little party from Nazareth is among the rest. But Jesus is not with them. So great, however, was the crowd, that it was not till the close of the first day's journey, that His Parents discovered that He was missing; for they supposed all the while that He was in the company, among their kinsfolk and acquaintance.

As soon as they found it out, they hastened back to Jerusalem with the greatest anxiety. And there, in the midst of the Temple, to their surprise they beheld Him surrounded by a group of learned men, called Doctors, or Teachers of the Law. There He was, with these venerable Elders hanging upon His lips, and hearing from Him such words as no child had ever uttered before.

His Mother at once addresses Him in language of affectionate remonstrance; "Son, why has thou thus dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrow-

ing." As much as to say, "Thou hast never before caused us a single pang. The hearts of other parents have been sometime grieved; but our hearts never experienced a moment's sorrow on Thy account. What has called Thee away from us now?"

This question drew forth those remarkable words, "How is it that ye sought Me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"

Then in the eye of Jesus, there is a higher work than that which concerns this world. There is a Father in heaven, a Master above, who has a stronger claim upon us even than our earthly father, or our earthly master.

How much we may learn from this heavenly Child! We know not what were the words He spoke to those aged Jewish doctors; but these few simple words addressed to His Parents contain a most instructive sermon in themselves. May we listen to it, and may it have a resting-place in our hearts!

Truly we have each of us some great work to do for God. What is it?

Did you ever watch a swarm of bees on a warm summer's day? All the members of that busy throng are employing themselves. Some may be seen flying quickly through the air in search of flowers from which to gather their harvest. Others are seen returning homewards with a goodly store of gathered honey. They enter the crowded hive, and deposit their burden; but there is no confusion. Others, again, may be seen building up the little cells, each one beautifully shaped according to the truest rule. And a few are posted near the entrance, fanning the air with their wings, for the sake of those within, who would otherwise be exhausted with their labor.

Here is a picture of God's Church, or Family on earth. He would have us *all* to be workers, busy in His service, laboring for Him, employed in the great work of His kingdom.

Why are we sent here? Is it to be idlers? Is it to do our own work, and to follow our own ways? Is it to labor only for the meat that perisheth, to toil here for a few years for this world's pay, and then to pass away, and be forgotten.

No, we have a nobler calling, a better portion than this. We must not leave the work of this world undone. The laborer, the tradesman, the farmer, all of us have our earthly duties to discharge. "If a man will not work, neither let him eat." It would indeed be a mistake, if the laborer were to leave the plough, because God had called him into His service; or if the tradesman were to neglect his customers, on the plea that his soul must be cared for; or if the farmer were to let the weeds grow in his fields, and his fallows remain unsown, because he has a God to serve, and a soul to be saved.

Thank God, He is no such hard Master. Instead of this, He *bids* us labor, and makes our very labor a means by which we may truly serve Him. We need not go out of the world to do His work. We shall serve Him most effectually if we carry our Christianity into the every-day occupation of life. How many there are in the world, who are always *wishing* to be useful—always *intending* to do something for God—often dreaming what they *might* do, if they were in such and such circumstances. And yet, if

they would but begin by doing something that is *close to their hands*, it would indeed be well. There is work enough before us, without looking elsewhere.

Are we Parents? We shall be doing God's work, if we train up our children for Him. Are we Masters? We shall be serving God, if for His sake we are kind and considerate, and watchful over those who are placed under our care by Him. Are we servants? Is labor our calling? God will accept our work, if we do it cheerfully and faithfully as unto the Lord, and not to man.

But *over and above* our earthly work there is a special work to do for God; or rather I would say, Whilst doing the lower work of earth, there is a higher, a nobler, a far greater work to be done for the Lord. He can employ us, if we have only the heart to be employed.

What shall we say then of those who spend their life in idleness, seeking their own pleasure, and wasting their precious moments on themselves; or of those who are busy and active, but it is about their own gain, or their own advancement in the

world? They may be harmless and inoffensive in their lives, and the world may pronounce them to be useful persons; but both the one and the other are in God's sight mere cumberers of the ground.

Now, what is the work He would have us to do?

The work of a Minister is plain enough—to preach the glad tidings of salvation—to explain to men God's Word and will—to care for souls, and to labor if by any means he may win them to Christ. This is the solemn work which is laid upon them. And truly if men should wish to draw them aside from it, they might well answer in the words of Nehemiah, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease, while I leave it?"

But *all* are not Ministers. And yet God has just as special a work for *you* to do in the world as for *them*. The Church of Christ is like that Hive. And if we really belong to it, there is an important task for each of us, and we shall certainly be doing it. The lowest and the least has a place allotted to him by the Lord; and happy for him if he is earnestly filling it.

For example, one may go and stand by the bedside of some afflicted neighbor, and speak to him comforting words of tenderness and truth. In so doing you will be showing your love to Him who said, "I was sick, and ye visited me." This is a Christian work, and a work which more would gladly engage in, if their hearts glowed with the love of souls. "Pure religion and undefiled is this, to visit the widows and fatherless in their affliction, and keep himself unspotted from the world."

Another may feel able to speak boldly for Christ, wherever he goes. He will not speak rashly, so as to bring religion into contempt, or proudly, as if he were better and wiser than others. But he will speak humbly, under a deeper sense of his own unworthiness. And thus he will try, as far as in him lies, to win men into Christ's service.

A third may not be able to *say* much. He may often long to speak; but his courage fails him. He has often prayed perhaps that he may be able; but the power is withheld. Still he may be useful, very useful, even more useful perhaps than one

who has a readier tongue. He may speak by his life. He may draw others into the fold by his holy and consistent conduct.

What shall I say more? There are a thousand ways by which we may be doing God's work, and furthering His cause in the world. The person who teaches a little group of Sunday-school children, from love to the Saviour—the person who counts it no trouble to go round a parish, to collect funds for sending the Gospel to the heathen—even the poor sufferer who is cut off from intercourse with the world, but who, as he lies upon his sick bed, prays earnestly and constantly for his brethren, that the Gospel may reach their hearts—these, and many more, are really doing God's work, and are fulfilling the task to which He has called them.

Surely God gives to *all* some opportunity of being useful. He may give to some but one talent, and to others ten. But He looks as graciously on him who has the one, if he employs that one rightly, as He does on him who has the ten. Yes, there are none among us, none so poor, none so young, none so old, none so unlearned,

none so occupied, but that they may do something for their heavenly Master, and for His people.

Is there any Drunkard whom you have anything to do with? Try and stop him in his downward course. Don't say, It is not my work. It *is* your work, if God gives you the opportunity. And though you may fail, as we often do, still He will accept your endeavor. Is there any one of your acquaintance thoughtless and careless? Beware lest you encourage that person by your silence, when you might say something to him, which by God's blessing would do him good. Is any one a neglecter of God's house? Use every effort to bring him with you into your Saviour's presence. He may be blest there, and you may save his soul.

I feel sure that each one of us has some influence over his brother. Depend upon it, we never come into a person's company, but we either do him good, or we do him harm. We may not perceive it at the time. The effect may be very small. So is the effect of a drop of rain, or a flake of snow, or a gleam of sunshine on the corn; but many

such drops, and flakes, and gleams, have a wondrous influence on the coming harvest.

Just reflect how very different is the influence which two men may have in their ordinary course through life.

One perhaps is a hard man of the world. He attends regularly to his business. He is up early. He never idles. There is no loitering by the way. His mind is set on gain; and therefore, if anything crosses his plans, it frets and irritates him. Every now and then a word will fall from his lips, which but too plainly shows that God is not in all his thoughts. If he goes into company, his remarks are rather against religion than for it. If anything is going on in his parish for the good of souls, or for the glory of God, he either opposes it, or passes it by in silence.

Think you, that such a man's influence can do no harm? It must do harm. We feel that it has done *us* harm, when we have been thrown in with one of this stamp.

But how different is the course of another person who carries into daily life the character and bearing of a Christian. His mind is

calm and peaceful ; and scarcely anything ruffles it. He has a kind word for every one. He is ready for every good work. If it be a right thing, he will at once lend a hand in forwarding it. He is not content to leave it to others, or to consider how he may avoid it with decency, but he is thankful to take part in it himself. If God has set him in a place of authority, he is anxious to promote the welfare, both bodily and spiritual, of those who are under him. If he is in a lower station, he will remember that he has an earthly, and a heavenly, Master ; and whilst he does the work of the one, he will not leave the work of the other undone. If he happens to be thrown among strangers, he will feel that the eye of his God is upon him ; and, like a true-hearted soldier, he will not be ashamed to show his colors. Wherever he is, and whatever he is doing, he will not forget his " Father's business."

What a vast difference between the two—the one constantly grieving his heavenly Father, and doing some little amount of harm to his fellow-men ; the other scattering blessings wherever he goes : the one

living most effectually to God ; the other living without Him in the world.

Which will you be ? May God give you grace to live, and act, and speak for Him, so long as life is spared to you !

And now, in bringing this subject to a close, I will once more call your attention to the words which I alluded to at the beginning of the chapter. Our Lord calls that *higher work*, of which we have been speaking, *His Father's business*—"Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business ?"

Now, it was not the great work of atonement that Jesus spoke of here. Neither was it the work of His ministry. For He did not come forth into public till eighteen years after this. But he speaks of Himself as a Son and Servant of God. And He felt that the work of God was *His* work, and that the great business before His mind was His "Father's business."

Let this same feeling be ever in our minds. And whilst many are putting earth's business above the calls of God—whilst they are saying in their hearts, "Worldly business, be thou my God ; I devote myself to

thee"—let us remember that we have a great and glorious work to do for our Father in heaven, and let us be ever ready to do it. The *will* will be given us, and the *power* too, if we entreat God to bestow it upon us. Yes, and life will be sweetened by the thought that we are doing something for Him, who has done so much for us. It is my heavenly Father, to whom I am indebted for all I am, and all I have. I live under His daily care. My soul is in His hourly keeping. I walk with Him day by day. I hope to dwell with Him for ever. Oh, wonder not that I desire to do His will. "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"

You and I shall soon be laid down upon our death-beds. And as we look back on the long past, we shall probably feel that there is much (oh, how much!) that we have *done amiss*. Many sins we shall then remember, which need a Saviour's blood to purge. But this is not all. Shall we not also feel that there is much that we have *left undone*—that we might have been more useful in our day—that we have neglected many golden opportunities? How very few of us

will be able to say, "I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do! I have labored for thee; I have spoken for Thee; I have acted for Thee; I have lived for Thee!"

We came into the world to *do*; not to *dream*. Let us then arouse ourselves. Let us be workmen for Christ. There is a great work to be done for Him in the world, and but very few to do it. Let us be among those few. And then too we have but a little while to work in. Our days are getting shorter and shorter. The night will soon come when no more work can be done.

Now, our Father is saying to us, "Son, work to-day in my vineyard." Soon He will say, "Son, give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward: thy work-day has closed for ever!"

Years ago, when you came into the world, God sent you on a special errand. And that errand was to glorify Him. To this end you were born, and for this cause you came into the world. Now, how have you fulfilled the end for which He sent you? Perhaps not

at all. You may have prospered. Your life may have been one great success. But one day you will perhaps discover that you have altogether missed the end for which God destined you. And oh, what a bitter pang will it be to find that you have lived altogether in vain !

But I trust that this may not be the case with you. May you be one of those whose earnest desire it is to serve Christ, and humbly to do the work to which He has called you.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GREAT END OF LIFE.

WHAT is the great *end* of life? What is the one chief object which the Christian should have ever before him?

If one who had never mixed with his fellow-men were to come among us, what would be the impression upon his mind? If he went into the streets of London, or into any of our manufacturing towns, what would he say of the men and women whom he met with? He would see that they are busy, they are active, they are striving for something. Their very countenances show an eagerness about their pursuits. They are up early; they are in bed late; they work hard. And, upon inquiry, he would find that all this is for *Gain*. The end their minds are fixed on is to get money.

Or if he fell in with some of the rich and noble of the land, he would see that many of them are only thinking how they can make a

merriment of life—how they can while away their days and hours in amusement. Then he would come to the conclusion that *Pleasure* is the great end of life, the great object to live for.

Or if he went to one of our Universities, he would find men, old and young, engaged in study—poring over their books perhaps for eight or ten hours in the day. From this he would gather that *Learning* is the great end of life.

Or if he mixed among our Soldiers and Sailors, and listened to their conversation, he would come away with the idea that *earthly Honor and Glory* is the great thing to live for.

Or suppose he came into one of our country villages, he would observe whole families dependent on their labor, earning their bread by the sweat of their brow, and entirely trusting to their weekly wages. And he would be led to imagine that *Getting a living* is the great aim of life.

Too true it is that a large portion of mankind have no further end in view, than gain, or pleasure, or learning, or earthly glory, or mere subsistence. But we must acknowl-

edge that these are but a poor aim for one who has an immortal soul, for one who at the first was created in God's image.

What then ought to be the end and object for which we are living ?

Is it *Pardon* ? We are coming nearer to it now. Well may the awakened penitent long for pardon. Well may he feel that to be rid of that heavy burden would be his greatest happiness. Well may he sigh for it, as the prisoner sighs for liberty. And, when he obtains it, well may he rejoice with a joy he never felt before.

But yet there is a higher end than this that the pardoned Christian may be looking for, and longing for. What is it ? Perhaps it is *Heaven*. This is a blessed and noble object to have in view—to live for heaven ; to have our eye ever turned towards that blessed abode, which we shall share for ever with the Lord Himself ! Yes, to secure our own salvation ; to win heaven for ourselves ; to be safe for eternity ; to have a firm, bright, joyous hope as regards the future ; this is unspeakably important to each one of us.

But if this be our *only* object, or even our

ruling object in life, then is there not something almost selfish in our aim? Thank God there is one higher and nobler still. And that is *to glorify God*.

Look at our great Pattern. Look at Him who, when He became man, became a *perfect* man. Now, from the very dawn of our Lord's earthly existence, to the hour when His life closed in, all was one continual glorifying of God. He was always doing the will of Him that sent Him. He was always about His Father's business. Again and again we find such words as these coming from His lips, "I seek not mine own glory," "I honor my Father." Watch Him at the grave of Lazarus. This object was foremost on His mind. With this view He raised the dead corpse to life. Hear how He speaks to Martha, "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God?" When the hour of His own sufferings drew near, He exclaimed, "Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say—Father, save me from this hour? But for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, *glorify thy name*." And again, "I have glorified thee on the earth;

I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do."

This is the great errand too, on which the Angels loved to be employed. How did the air ring with their joyful song, on the first Christmas morn, when they proclaimed, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men!" And such too has been the great and constraining object for which many a Believer has lived. What is the one motive which has led hundreds of God's servants to give their money, their time, their strength, their hearts to Him? It is the desire to bring glory to His name.

This was the secret of St. Paul's earnestness. This made him labor, and strive, and fight. This made him willing to bear shame, reproach, and suffering; yea, and even to count his very life not dear unto himself. If he could only promote His Master's glory, he felt himself abundantly repaid. He was content to be despised, so that Christ might be honored. He was willing to be abased, if only His Lord might be exalted. I hardly know such noble feelings uttered by any one, as those

which St. Paul expressed in writing to the Philippians—such entire putting down of self, that the kingdom of Christ, and His glory might be advanced; “The things which have happened unto me,” he says, “have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel; so that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places. And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident in my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife, and some also of good will. The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds; but the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel. What then? Notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice. . . According to my earnest expectation, and my hope, that in nothing shall I be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also, Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ.”

And what are the feelings that he recommends to his Christian brethren? Just the same feelings—nothing lower. “Ye are bought with a price; therefore *glorify God* in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s;” and again, “Whatsoever ye do, do all to *the glory of God*.”

So then, you see, this should be the great end and object of the Christian’s life—to glorify God.

Let me now put this matter before you in such a way that you may act upon it. I will offer you some directions, and mention some ways in which you may glorify God.

1. Try and wean yourself from all *self*-glorifying. Even where there is grace in the heart, we have need to be on our guard. Self is for ever endeavoring to get the upper hand. The old Adam—our old nature—is constantly striving to exalt itself. Like Diotrefes, we “love to have the pre-eminence.” We are continually wishing to be something more than Christ would have us to be. Oh, let us curb this desire and be willing to be nothing for Christ’s sake.

We ministers know perhaps more than any what this temptation is. To get a name for earnestness in our sacred calling—to acquit ourselves creditably before our people—to win their applause—to acquire a certain amount of popularity—these desires are for ever creeping in, and filling the place of purer and higher motives. Yes, and we may deceive ourselves, and fancy that we are doing God's work, and glorifying *Him*, when in fact we are only glorifying *ourselves*.

It is related of two Ministers, who had separate charges in London, both seemingly devoted to their work, and both preaching earnest and stirring sermons, that they made this agreement—that, whichever of them should die first, the spirit of the departed one should return, and declare to his Friend what was the sentence passed upon him and his work in the Lord's vineyard.

After a while one of the two died; and it is said that his spirit returned and appeared to the survivor. And when asked if he was now in the peaceful enjoyment of Paradise, reaping the reward of his abundant

labors, "No," he replied, "I am lost. I am cast away. I have been weighed in the balance, and found wanting." "Why?" it was asked. "Was not your preaching true and faithful? Were you condemned for aught you said as God's messenger?" "Oh no, it was not my words that were wrongly spoken; it was not my preaching that was wanting in energy or boldness; it was not my activity that lacked. But *this* it was—that, while I seemed to preach *Christ*, I was really preaching *myself*. It was my own good name, my own praise, my own glory, that I sought. The preaching of the cross was in very truth but the cloak that covered my empty profession of devotedness. And now that the cloak is torn away, I am left naked and stripped of all, and I must go down a soul-deceiver and a self-deceiver into Hell."

Though we cannot for a moment believe this narrative to be true, yet there is a point in it which may come home with searching power to all our hearts. Let us keep *self* in the background; and be often questioning ourselves, "Do I act from a proper motive? Am I wishing to gain a

name among men, or to advance the glory of my God?"

2. Set *God's* glory distinctly before you in all you do. I am to glorify *God*—this is the great end which I am to live for. Perhaps we have never thought of this. Perhaps we have never done a single thing in our whole lives from this grand and glorious motive. We have acted oftentimes from a desire to do what is right, from a sense of duty, or from a feeling of kindness and love, or from a wish to be useful. But how seldom have we done a thing from a simple desire to glorify God! And yet this is the highest and most blessed motive from which a Christian can act. This is doing as Christ did, and feeling as He felt.

St. Peter, speaking of our gifts, bids us to use them, "that God in all things may be glorified"—not in one thing, but in "*all* things"—not in great things merely, but in little things as well. And St. Paul goes still further, for he says, "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, *do all* to the glory of God." That is, in all the little actions of your daily life, let this one motive

be the mainspring of all your doings—to bring glory to Him.

3. Endeavor to honor God by *the holiness of your life*. Nothing brings such dishonor upon the Gospel, and nothing leads to such contempt for the truth, as the unholy lives of His professing people. And, on the other hand, nothing is so pleasing to Him, and brings such honor to His name and cause, as the holy lives of his followers.

We Christians are called with a *holy* calling. We are called to be like Jesus, holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. I often picture to myself a little band of holy men and women in any parish—a compact band, a loving band, a devoted band, of really consistent Christians—not mere professors, but possessors of Christ—not talkers, but workers—not hearers only, but doers of the Word—fruit-bearers, light-reflectors, living epistles of Christ, known and read of all men. What a blessed influence would they have on others; like leaven, spreading itself over the whole mass; like ointment, scattering around the perfume of godliness! This would give life to

our Churches. This would put to silence the gainsayer. This would attract, and win over, the unbeliever.

St. Paul speaks of our "adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things." What a word that is—*adorning* the doctrine! Can we add anything to that which is in itself so pure, and bright, and lovely, as the Gospel? Alas, we oftener throw a veil over it, and dim its beauties: we cast upon it many a blot, and so mar its charms. And yet we *may* adorn the Gospel, we may add a lustre to it, by living under its power. What more lovely picture is there in the world, than to see a holy and happy Christian acting out the Gospel in all he does?

Oh, let us try to make religion attractive by the blamelessness of our lives. Let us show forth the character of Christ in our daily conduct. Why is it that our Lord exhorts us to "let our light shine before men?" It is that they may be led, by seeing our good works, not to praise *us*, but "to glorify *our Father* which is in heaven." And, believe me, the poorest and humblest may do this. We may all let our light

shine for Christ. For do we not see the glorious sun reflected on the little tiny dew-drop, as well as on the boundless ocean? "Herein," says Christ, "is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit."

4. Make it *a subject of prayer* that you may glorify God.

We are taught to ask this in the pattern prayer which Jesus has given us. There, out of the seven petitions, which we are taught to offer, we plead in three of them for our Father's glory: "Hallowed be Thy name;" "Thy kingdom come;" "Thy will be done."

So too in our Prayer Book we ask again and again for this very thing; "Grant that we may evermore serve Thee in holiness and pureness of living, to *Thy honor and glory*." Again, in praying for our Rulers, we ask, "that they may above all things seek God's *honor and glory*." And for our governors, "that God would be pleased to direct and prosper all their consultations *to the advancement of His glory*." And then, more than once in the Service, our lips pour forth those few but stirring words of praise,

"*Glory* be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost."

Seek then to glorify God. It is He who has placed us where we are, who has appointed our lot for us. He has put us where we may best glorify Him, where we can do a work for Him, which we could not do elsewhere. We may glorify Him by patiently bearing whatever He is pleased to lay upon us, by cheerfully submitting to His will in all things. We may do so by our words, by our prayers, by our faith, by a holy and Christian life.

One cannot but respect a Son who has his Father's honor at heart. One cannot but admire a Soldier who would rather die than disgrace his country. And if *we* are worthy of the name of Sons, shall we not seek *our heavenly Father's* honor? If we are true Soldiers of Christ, shall we not desire above all things *our Saviour's* glory?

Let us determine to make this our constant aim. Let us be ever striving to do something for our God. The glory of His name, the honor of His cause, the advancement of His kingdom—oh, here is some-

thing indeed worth striving for! Let the world frown upon us; let our riches take to themselves wings and fly away; let poverty be our lot here; let us be counted as nothing in the estimate of our fellow-men: no matter, if we can, each of us in our little measure, adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour, and advance His glory in the world.

CHAPTER VII.

THE WORD OF GOD, THE NUTRIMENT OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

IN the preceding chapters I have dwelt principally on the *nature* of the Christian life. I have shown you what it is to live without God. I have called your attention to the great Turning-point in the Christian Life. I have directed you to Christ, as the Centre of that Life—Himself the very life of the soul. I have described to you what it is to live to God; and what is the great *work*, and also the chief *end* and *object* of the Christian Life.

In the next four chapters I shall show you how this life is *sustained* and *kept up* in the soul. And I shall speak first of the Word of God, as *the Nutriment* of this spiritual life. May God help me to speak wisely and usefully!

God has called us to live to Him; and He has made our happiness to consist in

doing so. Ten thousand are the ways by which He brings us from death unto life—by the voice of conscience; by the gentle working of His Spirit; by the preaching of His Word; by some startling visitation; by some arrow, shot perhaps at a venture, but directed to the heart by the Lord Himself. Yes, He has not one method merely, but *many*, for raising a soul from the cold grave of sin and worldliness to the resurrection life of grace.

But God does not leave us there. Lazarus, when a new life was granted to him, needed food to support his bodily frame: and so we need *spiritual* support. And God has specially provided it. Among those means of grace, which He has mercifully appointed, His *Word* stands first and foremost, as the food and nourishment of the renewed soul.

Let us consider the subject under these three heads—

I. The Word of God is the appointed means of our spiritual instruction.

II. That Word must be received into the soul, as its daily nourishment.

III. When so received, it brings joy and rejoicing to the heart.

I. The Word of God is *the appointed means of our instruction.*

1. God would have us *know* Him. Suppose we had been brought up without any instruction from our Parents, without a Minister to teach us, or without a Bible to make the truth of God known to us, what would be our state? We should know nothing of God, nothing of a Saviour, nothing of the world before us. We might have a feeling of want in our breasts, which nothing here could satisfy; a feeling of emptiness, which nothing here could fill. We might guess that there was a God above; and conscience might tell us that we have wronged Him, and strayed from His ways. But where could we look for pardon? Where could we find the desired atonement? We could know nothing of the Cross, nothing of a Saviour who has died, "the just for the unjust, to bring us to God." Something within might tell us that there is a world to come; but how dark and uncertain would be our views concerning it!

Blessed be God, He has revealed these things to us. He has made Himself known to us in His own Word. *There* we may read of His love in giving us a Saviour; and there we are told of that Saviour dying for us, and of His having gone before us to prepare a place for His elect.

The Bible teaches us to *know* God, and Jesus whom He hath sent. It is true that the mere *head-knowledge* of this will not save us; but if God give us His Holy Spirit to enlighten our minds, and to touch our hearts, then, as we read His Word, we shall get to know Him, to our comfort, peace, and salvation.

2. God would also have us *obey* Him. He is the Lord of the world. And it is just in proportion as we obey Him that we shall be happy. Surely, if we are God's people, our grand inquiry will be how we may do His will; how we may serve Him most effectually; how we may please Him.

And *where* can we learn this? There is no voice from heaven now, saying to us on every occasion, "It shall be told thee what thou must do." God does not send His angels to us, as He did to Jacob or to

Manoah. He does not declare His mind to us in a vision, as He did to Paul. He does not send a special messenger to us, as He did to King Hezekiah, or to Cornelius the Centurion. All His counsel is written in that sacred Book which we possess. And as we read that Book, we may discover in its pages directions for a holy and a happy life.

3. God would have us also to *love* Him. And how can we love Him, except we know Him? And how can we *show* our love, but by obeying Him? "If ye love me," says our Lord, "keep my commandments."

We are to love a Father whom we have never beheld, an unseen Saviour. But there, in the Bible, we have His glorious character placed before us. There we may see what He is, and what He has done for us. And thus our affections are drawn out, and our hearts won over to Him.

Let any one read his Bible earnestly and with prayer, and his heart cannot but burn within him, as he pictures to himself the goodness, and mercy, and love of his Almighty Friend. And the more God's truth lays hold of his heart, the deeper and warmer

will be his affection to Christ, who has done so much, and suffered so willingly for his sake. "We love Him, because He first loved us."

Do you find it hard to love God, to love the Saviour—hard to lift your leaden heart from off the soil of this world, and to soar upwards on the wings of gratitude? Read some passage in the Gospels or elsewhere, at the same time uttering a heartfelt prayer for a blessing; and, though you may have read the passage many times before, God *can* and *will* make it the means of giving fresh tenderness and fervor to your heart.

II. This Word must be *received into your soul as its daily nourishment.*

Our souls must be fed, as well as our bodies; and I have shown that God has provided for this. He has given His Word to be the spiritual food of the new-born soul, "that we may grow thereby."

Now bread and meat is of no use to the body, unless it is inwardly received by us. There may be an abundance of corn in our country; there may be ample provisions in

our houses; but if we do not feed upon them, we shall starve.

So it is with God's Word. We may have the Bible on our shelves. It may be near us. We may see it day by day. We may even read it with our eyes. And yet our souls may not be *nourished*. They may starve in the midst of plenty.

God's Word must sink below the surface, down into our very hearts. "The *entrance* of thy words," says David, "giveth light; it giveth understanding to the simple." And again, "Thy word have I *hid in my heart*."

What did the Prophet Jeremiah do with God's Word? First he tells us that he *found* it, "Thy words were found." Have you found God's Word to be the most precious treasure you can possess? You have had it within your reach all your life; but have you discovered its value?

A friend of mine was the possessor of a large tract of land. To the outward eye it seemed much like other land. But one day a bed of metal, called *manganese*, was discovered in one of his fields. From that moment the value of the field was increased

twenty-fold in his eyes. The rich mine had existed there all along; but he knew it not.

Perhaps it has been so with your Bible. Once you had it in your possession without knowing its value. But now you have found it out, to your exceeding joy.

That was a great discovery which is mentioned in 2 Kings, xxii., where we are told that Hilki'ah the Priest found in some old chest belonging to the Temple a code of the law of Moses, which had been lost for years, and well-nigh forgotten. He goes immediately to Shaphan the scribe, and says, "I have found the Book of the law in the House of the Lord." Shaphan eagerly read it himself; and then took it to the King, and read some passages of it aloud to him. Good King Josiah knew well its value, and prized it accordingly.

Martin Luther, too, the great German Reformer, who lived three hundred and fifty years ago, when we were all under the dark cloud of Romanism, one day was groping about in the library of his convent, and is said to have come accidentally upon a copy of the Bible. It was to him as bread to the hungry. He feasted his soul upon

it; and God brought it home to his inmost heart. That again was a great discovery.

And so too in these days, when it pleases God by His Spirit to awaken any one, then the Bible becomes, as it were, a new book. The soul hungers for God's truth, and there it finds the nourishment it needs.

But Jeremiah tells us another thing. "Thy words were found," he says, "and I did *eat* them." He fed upon them to the satisfying of his soul.

Look upon God's Word in this light—as your spiritual nourishment. Say to yourself, "I want enlightening, comforting, strengthening. I will sit down to the reading of Scripture as I would to my meal. I will ask God to bless me, and feed me with this bread of life."

You can use no better petitions than those of our well-known Collect, "Blessed Lord, who hast caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning, grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly *digest* them." Our ordinary food, when swallowed, must be digested; and so must the words of Scripture. We must think over them, meditate upon

them, and let them sink down into our hearts.

I believe that our Bible-reading would be a very different thing, if we came to it in this spirit. What is it to many of us? A mere task, a dry, uninteresting duty which we feel it right to go through. No wonder that such persons find no benefit from their reading. They have no appetite for God's Word, and therefore they cannot say, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them."

Remember, then, it must be your constant *daily* nourishment. When any one says, "I read my Bible *sometimes*," I can guess pretty well the state of that person's soul. What! brethren, is it so with your ordinary meals? Do you sit down to them only *sometimes*? Do you let your dinner-hour or your supper-hour pass by, because you have other things to do? Do you ever spend a day without food, and yet not so much as notice it? If so, you cannot be in health. There must be something wrong with you. And if you have no appetite for God's Word, if you do not feel that your soul longs for this spiritual nourishment, all cannot be right with you. There cannot be

health within. If all was well with your soul, you would sooner suffer "a famine of bread, or a thirst of water," than of reading or "hearing the Word of the Lord."

A real love for the Bible, a hungering for its truths which nothing but a constant daily reading of it will satisfy—this is a sure sign of a converted soul.

Read the Bible then every day. Have your fixed hour for it, as you would for any one of your meals. Read it with earnest prayer for the teachings of the Spirit. Ask God to make it a nourishing word to you. This is the kind of reading that will do you good. Thus will your soul thrive.

III. The Word, when so received, *brings joy and rejoicing to the heart*. I referred just now to Jeremiah. Well, he had "eaten," or fed upon, God's words. And what was the effect they produced upon his soul? Did this spiritual meal answer his expectation, or disappoint him? Hear what he says, "Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." This was his testimony. And such, too, was David's. He also ate the same spiritual food. And what

is his account of it? "How sweet are thy words unto my taste! Yea, sweeter than honey unto my mouth!" And Job's experience is the same, "I have esteemed the words of thy mouth more than my necessary food."

Fancy yourself for a moment in the deserts between Jerusalem and Gaza. You see a man coming along in his chariot, and reading as he travels. He is very thoughtful. The Book he is intent upon is deeply interesting to him. He is an Eunuch of Ethiopia; and he is reading a portion of the Prophet Isaiah. Presently one joins him, to whom that Book is familiar. He explains it to him. The Eunuch *now* sees that it speaks of Christ. At once a new light breaks in upon him. A new rill of joy is opened in his soul. He believes, and "goes on his way *rejoicing*."

Or again, fancy yourself in one of our English prisons some three hundred years ago. There you would have seen a venerable man, a Minister of Christ, bound under sentence of death; a prisoner of the Lord; a martyr for the cause of Christ. As he sits in his solitary cell, there is one com-

panion that cheers him—a Companion that is for ever whispering to him, “Let not your heart be troubled, neither be afraid;” “Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven.” That Companion is his Bible, his precious Bible. *That* brings peace and comfort to his soul.

Once more; go into some sick room, under a cottage roof. There will you find lying upon his bed some poor worn-out sufferer. He has lain there perhaps for months. Sleep seldom closes his eyes. He scarcely knows what it is to be free from pain. His pale countenance speaks plainly of a fatal disease within. And yet he is calm, peaceful, and resigned. And more than this—he is happy. And what makes him so? See him pull his well-worn Bible from beneath his pillow. And mark what a bright ray of hope beams upon his countenance, as he reads his morning Psalm, or traces the loving words of gospel truth. There Christ is made known to him, the great deliverer from sin and sorrow.

Truly this brings “joy and rejoicing to the heart.” Proud Pharisees may pass over the words of God with indifference, just as

"the full soul loatheth an honeycomb;" but the humble child of God will ever thankfully exclaim, "Thy testimonies have I claimed as my heritage for ever." And why? "They are the *very joy* of my heart."

Let me then once more counsel you to take up your Bible as the meat and drink of your soul. If you wish to get your faith strengthened, your heart warmed, your spiritual knowledge deepened; if you wish to stand firm on the rock, unshaken by the opinions of men; if you wish to be a bold, strong, earnest Christian; live upon God's Word; get acquainted with its blessed truths; feed upon those green pastures which He has provided for His flock. Do not be content with getting a few Scripture phrases upon your lips; but get the spirit of Scripture into your heart. Get your soul leavened with its heavenly savor. This will bring you to know God and make you "wise unto salvation."

One word more. Never take up the sacred volume without remembering that He, whose Book it is, must open its pages to

your view. You cannot understand it; you cannot feel its power; unless God lifts up the veil from your heart. It will be to you "as the words of a book that is sealed," unless He unlocks it. Never do we want light and grace so much as when we are reading God's Word. And never, I believe, is He so ready to bestow it.

The Lord enable you more and more to prize your Bible! May you be ready to say, "I have found the Word of God to be precious to my soul. Once I cared more for the outside, than for its contents. Once it had a place on my table, but no place in my heart. Once I looked into it *now and then* as a matter of duty or to while away a half-hour. Now it is my constant companion, the food of my soul, the comfort, the delight, the joy and rejoicing of my heart."

CHAPTER VIII.

PREACHING, A SAVING ORDINANCE IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

How is it that the Word of God is read for weeks and months together with so little profit? How is it that it is often preached with great ability, and with much earnestness, and yet it never gets beyond the outward ear of some who sit and listen to it? The truth is, there are many hearts which the Word of God has never yet effectually reached. A person may hear sermons with much attention; he may thoroughly understand what he hears, and store it up in his memory; but if God's Word goes no farther than this, it will not be a *saving* word to his soul. If the Holy Spirit does not apply it to his conscience, very little good will be done.

Now St. James, speaking of the Gospel, calls it, "the *engrafted* word." He uses this
(112)

striking expression to show that it must not only be preached to us ; it must not only be sounded in our ears ; it must not only be listened to with gladness ; but it must work its way into our hearts. "*Receive*," he says, "the engrafted word." "*Receive it*," as you would a friend who is welcome to your house. You would not bid him stand at the door without. You would let him in, and give him a choice place by your hearth. "*Receive it*," as you would some remedy which was able to save your life. Surely you would not place the bottle by your bedside, and merely gaze upon it. You would eagerly drink its contents, as that which was likely to cure you.

"The engrafted word !" What is the process with a graft ? It is not enough to take the slip and fasten it on the tree ; but we must let it *into* the tree, or else it will take no effect. Just so must the Word of God enter it ; it must get below the surface, and touch the very heart. Thus David says, "The *entrance* of thy words giveth wisdom:" and again, "Thy word have I *hid in mine heart*." And St. Paul thus exhorts us, "Let the word of Christ *dwell in*

you richly"—let it not only float in your fancy, but enter your heart, and lodge deep in your soul.

But this expression seems to teach us something further. It teaches us that God's Word has a life-giving power: it must *live* within us. Should we be content to see the graft fixed ever so firmly in the tree? No, it must *live* and *grow* there, and produce a better and more abundant crop of fruit. And so too must it be with God's Word. It must be a *living* word within us. It must work a mighty change there. Its power must be felt within.

Have you thus received the Word? You have heard it again and again. It may be, you have listened to it with deep attention. You have been struck by it. Perhaps the Preacher's words have made you thoughtful for the moment. You have gone home with deep searchings of heart. You have had a glimpse, as it were, of the world to come. You have been forced to look into your own heart. You have seen it to be *very* sinful, and you have felt your pressing need of a Saviour. But have you *received* the Word? Have you heartily welcomed

it to your soul? If it be indeed grafted by the Master's hand, you will know it by this token—it will be fruitful; it will spring up.

It does indeed make one sad to think, on how few hearts the Word of God takes real and saving effect! How many listen and listen, and yet come short of being converted! Some seed falls by the way-side; and it is soon snatched away. Some falls, as *we* fancy, into welcome ears; but it takes no root. And some too is quickly choked by the stifling business, and cares, and worry of the world. Thank God it does *sometimes* light upon a better soil; and there it sinks in, and grows, and brings forth fruit unto life eternal.

Take heed how you hear. It is not a light matter to listen to a sermon. That sermon may be for the saving or the condemning of your soul. Every sermon you hear is for eternity. And just as the stroke of the blacksmith's hammer either makes the iron harder, or breaks it in pieces, so it is with the preached Gospel. Be sure, it never leaves any one as it finds him. It either makes his heart tender, or it leaves

him more hardened than before. It is either "the savor of life unto life," or the "savor of death," to his soul.

But let us inquire, *how* we should receive the Word. There is something that we must *leave behind*, and something that we must *bring with us*, to the hearing of God's Word.

We must leave behind our *Pride*. The man who comes to church with a proud, self-satisfied spirit is pretty sure to get no good for his soul. It is "the hungry" whom God loves to fill with the good things of His Gospel; but "the rich" (those who fancy that they have need of nothing) "He sends empty away." It has been well said that "it is only a broken heart, that can receive a crucified Christ."

The *World* too must be left behind. How many think of the world, and the world only, all the six days of the week. Ay, and even on the Sabbath morning, the world still occupies their thoughts and hearts. When the hour of service comes, they hurry off to the House of God; and then they find themselves but little disposed

for Prayer, and ill prepared to listen to the Word. And what wonder is it that it should be so? The world has been allowed to have full sway over them; is it to be expected then that they should be able in a moment to put it aside at their bidding? No, it still hovers around them. It clings to them, and they cannot shake it off. It creeps in as their companion in the very House of God. It stands by them, when they are upon their knees. It fills their minds, when they would be thinking of God. It blocks up the door of their hearts, lest the good seed should enter in. The minister of Christ speaks words of solemn moment; but the heart is too full of earthly cares, and plans, and pleasures, to receive them. Like the inn at Bethlehem, there is no room there to welcome Christ. Yes, the *world* must be left behind, if we would profit by God's ordinance.

And there is yet another thing, too, that must be laid aside; and that is, *Sin*. In the words, which I just now quoted, St. James speaks of "laying apart all filthiness and naughtiness;" and *then*, he says, "Receive the engrafted word." The heart must be

cleared out and emptied, before God's truth can lodge within us. Ah, here is the secret reason why so many are *moved* by sermons, and are yet *unchanged* by them; so many are fully *convinced*, and yet remain *unconverted*. They feel persuaded that sin is ruining their souls, and that Christ alone can make them happy; that if they could only give their whole hearts to Him, they would feel a joy which they have hitherto missed. And yet they do not close with Christ. And why? Because they love their sins better. You will find perhaps hereafter that there was some sin—some little sin—some secret, hidden, heart sin—which you would not give up; and that that sin kept you from Christ, and hindered you from entering His blessed kingdom.

Oh, if your conscience whispers, "Alas! so it is with me," I would affectionately urge you forthwith to part with that sin, whatever it may be, and however much it may cost you. Part with it, though it be dearer to you than a right hand or a right eye, or you must never hope to see God.

But there is not only something which

must be *laid aside*, but also something that we must *bring with us* to the hearing of God's truth. Here, again, we will take St. James's words. The apostle says, "Receive *with meekness* the engrafted word." A humble, meek, and teachable spirit is what we want. And this is the frame of mind that God will bless. God loves to teach the humble, child-like heart: "The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way. "Pride nips the tender bud, and no fruit is brought to perfection. If we go to the house of God to pass judgment on the sermon we hear, and to set up our own wisdom against God's teaching, sure I am that we shall hear in vain. But every true servant of God will come with a mind to *obey*. He only waits for a discovery of the truth, and then he will follow it. His language is like that of Job, "What I see not, teach thou me." He is ready to say with Cornelius, "We are all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God."

Whether you open your Bible at home, and sit down to read it, or whether you come to the house of God to listen to the

preaching of it, be humble; for it is not man that speaks, but God. Remember your need of a heavenly Teacher. Put up a secret prayer to God, that He would clear away the mist from before you, and shine upon His own Word. Entreat the Holy Spirit to apply the truth to your heart, and to take of the things of Christ, and show them to you. Thus will those truths, which hitherto perhaps have been hidden from your soul, break in with new life, shedding peace and joy into your heart.

But just consider, brethren, the wonderful power there is in God's Word. It is "able to save the soul"—not merely to enlighten, to comfort, to quicken—but to *save*.

What! you may say, can God's Word *save*? Is not this too much to declare? When received into the heart, and engrafted there by the hand of God, it *has* saved, and it *does* save. We do not mean that it has power *in itself* to save a soul, but that it is an instrument which God uses for this purpose. It is the hammer by which He breaks the rock in pieces, and then puts it together in His own best way.

Neither do we mean that the Word saves a man in a moment—at once. Salvation is a work that must not only be *begun*, but *carried on*, in the heart of a child of God. He is not saved by a single sermon. His attention may be powerfully aroused, and he may be led to seek salvation in earnest. He may be set forward on the road that leads to heaven. But he needs *continual* grace and teaching, before he safely reaches his journey's end.

But *how* does the Word do this? *How* does it save? It saves a man by first showing him that he is ruined, that he is under the wrath of God, and that he cannot save himself. What a blessing when we have learnt this lesson—when we stand stript of our own righteousness, pleading guilty before God! Happy for us if the Word of God has taught us this. It is one thing to acknowledge our guilt; but it is quite another thing to *feel* it,—to feel sin as a burden weighing down our souls, that we long to get rid of.

Well, this is part of the teaching of God's Word, when applied to the heart by the Spirit. It convinces of sin. It brings us

to a stand. It leads us to cry out with all earnestness, "I am a sinful man; God be merciful to me." This is *one stage* of that blessed process by which the Word saves; it shows us our absolute need of a Saviour.

But, thank God, we are not left there. This is only *a part* of the work, though a most important part; for, until the sick man is made conscious of his disease, he will care little for the physician.

But the Gospel not only reveals to us our *disease* and our *danger*, but also our *remedy*. It says to the convinced and trembling sinner, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!" This is the glory of our message. This is the blessed errand on which we are sent to you—to tell you of God's love—of Christ's atonement—that the door of heaven stands open to you. We pray you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.

Thus does the engrafted Word *save*. When it comes with quickening power to the soul, it awakens men from their slumber; it lays bare their hearts: it shows them that they are undone; it points to the cross; it tells them of a fountain, in which

they may wash and be clean : and it tells them too of that indwelling Spirit, who can make them meet and fit to dwell with God above.

How great are the triumphs of God's Word ! What did it effect on the day of Pentecost ? And what *has* it effected since ? Has there never been a time in our own experience, when we have felt sad and down-hearted ? We have looked for comfort, and found it not. We have gone to our Bible, with a secret prayer, that God would give His blessing ; and then He Himself has shone upon its pages. The dark, heavy cloud has passed away, and some bright ray from His everlasting truth has beamed in upon us with its cheering light ; so that we have got up gladdened and rejoicing. And is there not many a one who owes all his happiness to the simple preaching of God's truth ? He was once careless and worldly ; but he went to the Lord's house, and there his attention was arrested, and his conscience pricked. He heard, he listened, he believed. He became an altered man.

Are we going too far then when we speak

of this as the great instrument in God's hands for saving souls? Oh, it *is* saving many, daily and hourly! May it save many more! May the words spoken from our pulpits never be spoken in vain! Shall we not, one and all, pray, and that earnestly, that God may be pleased to make His house a "Bethesda," "a house of mercy," to numbers who meet within its walls—a place where they may get light, and comfort, and peace to their souls—that God will pour out upon those who worship there "the Spirit of grace and of supplications"—and that He will give life and power to His own Word? Ask for this. Ask God to give to yourself and others what we so much need, the quickening, sanctifying, comforting influence of His grace.

CHAPTER IX.

PRAYER, THE BREATH OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

WHAT an important moment that is, when a living child comes into the world! How great is the anxiety with which a mother listens to the first breathing, or hears the first faint cry, of the new-born babe! That cry, which only disturbs and annoys others, is sweet to her ear.

Ah, there is a Parent who feels more for us than even a mother does for her little ones. A woman *may* forget her sucking child, and not have compassion on the fruit of her womb; but God cannot lose His tenderness. He is love itself. The first breathing of new life in His children, the first cry which is sent up to Him from a heart in distress, fills heaven with joy. Now, Prayer is the breathing of a new-born soul. It is the first sign of life.

I am to speak in this chapter about

Prayer, which I have called, "the *Breath* of the Christian life." Blessed subject! May God teach us what Prayer is, and quicken us in the exercise of it!

What is Prayer?

Ask the *Worldly-minded man*. He will tell you what it is to *him*. It is something which he knows he ought to do; something which he has been brought up to do; something which his conscience will not let him leave altogether undone. But he has no pleasure in it. It is irksome to him. He is glad enough when it is over.

Ask the *Pharisee*—the *Formalist*. He seems to think that it is the mere utterance of words; the mere repeating certain holy sentences on his knees; the mere outward acknowledgment that God is the great Giver of all things.

But we can go to better teachers than these.

Ask *David* what prayer is. "As for me, I will call upon God;" "I will cry unto God most high;" "I cried with my whole heart; I prevented the dawning of the morning;" "As the hart (or stag) panteth after the

water-brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee,
O God: my soul thirsteth for God."

Ask *Jacob*. He will tell you that it is a
"wrestling" with God.

Ask *Daniel*. It was something real with
him. Not even the wrath of the king could
close his lips. He prayed three times a-
day, though at the risk of his life.

Ask *Saul of Tarsus*. "Go to him,
Ananias," said the Lord; "behold he
prayeth."

Ask that *penitent Prodigal*, when from
his wounded, aching heart those words
came streaming forth, "Father, I have
sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and
am no more worthy to be called thy son."

Ask *the Publican*, as he stands in the
House of God, smiting his breast. Few
words indeed he spoke; but they were
earnest, burning words, which came forth
from the very depths of his heart.

Ask *the holy Saviour*. He spent whole
nights in prayer; not because He was
obliged to pray, but because He *found com-
fort* in prayer.

Once more, let us ask *Jeremiah*, who
wrote the Book of Lamentations. He says

in the 55th verse of the third chapter, "I called upon thy name, O Lord, out of the low dungeon. Thou hast heard my voice : hide not thine ear at my breathing, at my cry. Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee ; thou saidst, Fear not."

"Prayer," observes a Christian writer, "is human need craving the Divine fulness ; the wretchedness of earth begging the consolations of Heaven ; man's guilt beseeching the mercy of God. By prayer the helplessness of the creature clings to the strength of the Creator. Prayer is a voice from Nature's womb, calling to the Heavenly Healer. All creation prays. The little plant droops its head, and curls its leaves ; and thus asks for moisture. The sheep that has lost its lamb, fills the air with its piteous bleating. The dog howls when he is hungry ; and he has been known to entreat you, almost with the power of speech, to follow him to the lonely spot, where his master lies wounded and bleeding."

Every child of God prays. Where there is spiritual life there must, and will, be prayer. As surely as a living man breathes, so surely will a living soul pray. We have

many and great wants, especially spiritual wants; but it is only when we are brought under God's converting grace, that we begin to *feel* those wants.

Let me now give you some hints about your every-day prayers. I trust that many of you have a real wish to live a Christian life, and that you are ready to welcome any directions which we can give you.

First, then, as to the particular *Kind* of Prayer that we are now speaking about—*Private* Prayer. Other Prayer is also needful. It is very good for us to meet in the House of God for Public Worship. A peculiar blessing seems to be promised us when we do so. Christ pledges Himself to be in the midst of us. It is good for us too to assemble our *families* for prayer.

But it is *Private, Closet* prayer that I am now dwelling upon. And how needful this is! How necessary for us to get apart from our fellow-men, and draw near to our heavenly Friend in the silence of our chambers! I believe, if there was *more* of such prayer, and more *earnestness* in it, there would be

more advance in the spiritual life, more growing up unto Christ in all things.

When we call it "Closet Prayer," we are using our Lord's own words; for He says, "And thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy *closet*." Some of us have no difficulty here. We have our own quiet rooms, where we may go, and no one will disturb us. Be thankful for it. Enter into thy closet. Let the walls of it witness to many a fervent prayer offered there. Remember, God is near, and never so near as when we are calling upon Him. Open your heart to Him. Tell Him of all your *wants*. Go to Him in all your *trials*. Let Him be your *Friend*, to whom you fly in every season; your *Counsellor*, whom you love to consult; the *Companion*, with whom you delight to hold intercourse.

But some have no private room, where they can be alone—no door which they can close, so as to shut out all interruption. Some are so much mixed up with the busy world that they are seldom at home. But still there is a way of feeling ourselves alone even in a crowd, even amidst the bustle of life. The noisy room, the crowded work-

shop, the open field, or the roadside, *may* be our closet. And God can and will hear us there, if we call upon Him. We can lift up our *hearts* without lifting up our *voices*. We need not be alone to do this. The silent breathing of the soul is sufficient.

Next, as to the *Manner* of our prayers.

There must be *earnestness*. Jeremiah speaks of it as a *cry*; "Hide not thine ear at my cry."

When Esau had been cheated of his father's blessing, what earnestness there was in his complaint! We are told that "when he heard the words of his father, he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and said unto his father, Bless me, even me, O my father." Such, too, was the cry of the Israelites, when their spirit was almost broken by the cruelty they met with in Egypt.

"They sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried; and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant."

I have been present at death-beds, when the slumbering soul has at length woke up, and cried imploringly for mercy.

We have heard of shipwrecks, too, and of the piercing cries that have been uttered, when those on board felt that death was near. I lately read of one, who, while wandering along a lonely and rocky shore when the tide was down, slipped his foot into a narrow crevice. To his horror, he found he could not withdraw his imprisoned limb. There he sat, with his face to the approaching waves; he knew that, as the tide came in, it would rise upon him inch by inch, till it washed over his head. Did he cry for help? Yes, we may be sure he did; and who could doubt his earnestness? He cried, but none heard him. He saw here and there a boat in the distance; but his signal did not attract their notice. How he must have envied the very sea-gull, as it skimmed the air above his head! And as he watched the waters rising inch by inch, his cries never ceased, till the last wave swelled up, and washed the dying shriek from his lips.

There was *no* help for *him*. There *is* for *us*. "Call unto me, and I will answer thee," says our Lord. And why should any of us be less earnest than the man on the sea-

shore was? Our past sins, and our present iniquities, press upon us; and we need *pardon*. Temptation assails us each day and each hour of our lives; and we need *help*. We are poor, and blind, and weak; and we need *strength* from God.

Then, do not look upon prayer as a thing which may be shuffled over in a few moments; as a duty which may be engaged in sleepily and carelessly: but let us look upon it as a thing into which we must put our *whole hearts*. Let it be a cry from our *inmost souls*.

There must also be *reality* in our prayers. Our prayers must be *real*. It is very easy to speak words which we do not *feel*. Our *lips* get into the way of uttering what our *hearts* deny. We often speak, for instance, very humbly of ourselves, when perhaps there is no humility within. We acknowledge before God that we are sinners, when all the while sin is not *felt* by us. We ask for grace, without having any *desire* for it.

Be real. Be honest with God. Say nothing to Him which is not strictly true. And if you cannot feel in your *heart* what

your *head* tells you that you *ought* to feel, ask God that the feeling may be given you.

Again, pray *often*. Will once, twice, three times a-day be enough? some one will perhaps ask. Yes, it will be enough, and too much, for us, if our souls are asleep. It will be too much, if our minds are engrossed with this world. We shall have no time for prayer. There are other things to take up our thoughts. We are too busy for such a work as this. Ah, try and plead this with God; "I am too busy." Try and say it to Him, this night in your prayers; "Lord, I have no time to seek Thee." You dare not. Will you plead it in your dying hour, or at the judgment day? Will you say, "I had no time?" Rather say the truth; "I had *no heart* for prayer; I lived to gain the world. I gained it: but I lost my soul."

Be often in prayer, O believer. Thy Father hears thee. He is ready to answer thee. Be often in His presence. Your prayers may not be always *expressed*. There may be no *utterance*. Your petition may be sent up to heaven, without any cry being *heard*. Remember, prayer is *the breath* of a soul. It may be but a *gentle* breathing,

and yet God can hear it. Think of Jeremiah's words, "Hide not thine ear at my *breathing*."

A few words now about *the Difficulties* we find in our prayers.

Perhaps *this* has been a difficulty with you—If God orders everything, and has planned beforehand everything that happens, what is the use of my praying? But surely if this stops the wheels of *prayer*, it ought also to stop the wheels of *business*. You might say, If God has ordained that I and my family should be well off in the world, it will be so; whether I provide for them or not. Or again, one might argue that if God has determined whether I shall live to old age or not, I shall reach that age which He has fixed upon; and therefore it matters not whether I am careful or not about my health or my safety. You will see then at once the folly of making God's forethought a reason why we should not pray.

You may feel another difficulty. Do you not often find it very hard to get *your hearts in tune* for prayer? You know not how it

is, but you seldom are in the humor for it. I will tell you how it is. You give yourself up to the world. You lose sight of heaven perhaps all day. And therefore no wonder that you cannot, when the hour of prayer comes, bring your mind to seek God. You come to the throne of grace with your heart loaded with the plans, the toils, the difficulties, the disappointments, the irritations of the day. You come, dragging the world with you into God's presence. And the consequence is you feel ready for anything else rather than prayer. It *must* be so, if the world is allowed to have full dominion over your heart.

Now if you suffer from this sad feeling—if this is indeed your unhappy experience—do not be tempted to think that it is better to give up prayer, when your heart is not in tune for it. Rather try and shake the world off; for if it hinders you in prayer, it will certainly be in the way of your reaching heaven. The Prophet complained of the Jews in his day, "*None stirreth himself up to take hold on thee.*" We must arouse ourselves. We must stir up our drowsy hearts, and ask God to put us into a better frame.

Yes, and I will go farther, and say, If a man has so much worldly business on his hands, that it occupies all his thoughts, and calls away his mind from higher and holier things, let him give up his business—let him part with his earthly cares—rather than forfeit heaven. It is better to beg in the streets, than to die rich, but unsaved.

There is another complaint, which even *God's people* sometimes make. They do not experience that *enjoyment* in prayer which they hear so many speak of.

If our hearts are not *right* with God, there can be *no* enjoyment in prayer. An impenitent man has no heart to pray. David once said, "Thy servant hath *found in his heart* to pray this prayer unto thee." But an impenitent, worldly man has no such thing in *his* heart. He finds there no desire for God. The work of prayer is unsuited to his taste. He may *force* himself into it for a time, but he cannot *love* it: it is impossible.

Hide not from yourself this truth, that the entire absence of joy in prayer is a sad but sure sign that you are a stranger to true religion. But I was rather speaking of those who are *serving* God, and yet com-

plain that they do not find the joy they could wish in praying. How is this? Perhaps we are not living so near to God as we might live. There is a lack of close intercourse with Him. There is too wide a gap between Him and our souls. We have taken Him perhaps as our hope and our refuge, but not as the friend of our daily life. Surely, if we knew Him better, and walked more closely with Him, we should soon feel the real enjoyment of conversing with Him in prayer. Our moments of devotion would be our happiest moments. The hour of prayer would indeed be to us a blessed hour.

There are times, I dare say, when you feel warmth. Your heart glows within you, and God seems to be very near to you. And then you grow cold again, and the spirit of prayer flags within you. Now, did you ever try to *keep up* this warmth of feeling? Did you ever make a *direct effort* to do so? It may be done by meditation, by watchfulness, and by fixing the heart on God. When the fire burns in your soul, *keep it* alight. Don't let it go out. Beseech God to fan the flame, and to make

you feel, not *sometimes* but *always*, in an earnest, believing, loving frame.

Lastly, who does not feel that his mind is sadly apt to *wander* in prayer? This is a great difficulty with any one who prays. But I am sure that if we were more watchful, this might, in a great measure, be got over.

When you kneel down, think what you are going to do, whom you are going to address, and what you are going to ask. Remember you are in the presence of the Great King, your Almighty Father; therefore, as Solomon says, "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything before God."

I have sometimes found it good to walk up and down my room, when engaged in prayer. I would not recommend this as a *regular habit*; but it may be desirable *occasionally*, and especially when our minds are disposed to wander.

After all, the very best of us pray but very poorly. But if we make a conscience of our prayers, and if we desire to render them what they should be, God will strengthen us. The Holy Spirit will "help

our infirmities," teaching us what to ask, and how to ask, and giving us such a praying frame as will make us feel that it is good for us to draw near to God.

Be encouraged to pray more earnestly, more frequently, and with more reality. When you send a message by the telegraph, you expect it to reach its destination; you expect it to accomplish the purpose for which it is sent. Expect the same with your prayers. *Lose* this idea of reality, and your devotion will droop; your prayer will become a mere form. It has been said by an old writer, that "Good prayers never come weeping home." No, they are quite sure to bring down a blessing from Him, who is so ready to give, and has so much to bestow.

CHAPTER X.

THE LORD'S DAY, THE HOLIDAY OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

A "HOLIDAY," or "Festival," used to be the name given to those days which the Church specially sets apart to be observed by her children. The Passover, Pentecost, and the Sabbath were counted as Holidays by the Jews; and Christmas, Easter, Ascension Day, Whitsuntide, and the Lord's Day, are Holidays in the Christian Church.

But as no *work* was done on these days, they were by degrees turned into seasons of *worldly rejoicing*; so that the word "Holiday" got at length to signify a day of *liberty*—a day of *pleasure*—in short, any day when public business was put aside.

I have called the Lord's Day "the *Holiday* of the Christian Life." But you will, of course, understand that I use the expression in its best and highest sense—in the same

sense as Moses used it in Exodus, xxxv. 2, where he says, "Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be to you an *holy day*, a sabbath of rest to the Lord." In the same sense too as it is used in Isaiah, lviii. 13, "If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my *holy day*." And in the same sense that David uses it in the forty-second Psalm.

These last words want a little explaining to make them clear. They are supposed to have been written by David at a time when he was away from his own home, and cut off from the comforting ordinances of the sanctuary. In the first verse, he expresses his holy longing for God: "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, the living God; when shall I come and appear before God"—that is, appear before Him in His courts? In the third verse, he mentions the taunts with which his ungodly enemies assailed him, "My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, 'Where is thy God?' Then, in the fourth

verse, he calls to remembrance the joy and comfort, which he used to experience in Public Worship with his brethren; "When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me; for I had gone with the multitude; I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept *Holy-Day*."

The expression "holyday" or "holiday," when speaking of our Christian Sabbath, is a very delightful one to my mind. For it gives us the idea of a *sacred* day set apart for God; also of a day of *rest*, and yet a *busy* day; and, further, of a *joyful, happy* day.

Let us take this view of it. And may the Lord ever make His own day a day of many blessings to our souls!

First, Look upon your Sundays as sacred days, set apart for God.

One day in seven has been a consecrated day from the very first. In Genesis, ii. we read of Adam having his Sabbath in the garden of Eden. Then, in giving His commands to the Jews, the Lord laid great stress on the observance of the Sabbath. He made the breaking of it a most serious

offence. Again, when He rained down Manna from heaven for His people in the wilderness, this remarkable fact occurred—although on every day the ground was strewed with this heaven-sent food, not a particle appeared on the seventh day; and yet they had enough to last them during that day also. Thus did He constantly remind His people of its sacredness.

When our Lord came on earth, He observed the Sabbath, doing only works of mercy or of necessity upon it. We find the early Christians meeting together, not on the last day of the week as heretofore, but on the first, in honor of our Lord's resurrection. They met for Prayer, and for the Breaking of bread. And Christians have always observed this blessed custom up to the present time. I do believe that a marked blessing rests on that family, and on that individual, who honors God's day. The promise still holds good, "Blessed is the man who doeth this, and the son of man that layeth hold on it, that keepeth the Sabbath from polluting it. Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my

walls a place and a name better than of sons and daughters."

Thank God, the sacredness of the Christian Sabbath is observed in this our land. That would be a sad day for America, if its strictness should be set aside, and the world should be allowed to come in upon us like a flood, and overwhelm us with its daily cares and occupations. And that would be a sad day for *any one of us*, if we were to break down the partition wall which parts off this from every other day, and think lightly of the ordinance of God.

Learn, then, to look upon the Lord's Day as the day which is peculiarly His own—not yours, but His. He calls it His own. He claims it as His own. Let us give it to Him as His right, willingly and cheerfully. Just as the Bible is different from other *books*, so Sunday is different from other *days*. Other books are men's words: the Bible is God's word. So other days are man's in which he may labor: this day is the Lord's.

It is true, that on Sunday the sun rises and sets as usual. The winds and the rain come down as at other times. But in this Chris-

tian land everything puts on, as it were, its Sunday dress: there is a stillness and quietness about the day which remind us that it is the Sabbath of the Lord. Oh, that our hearts may be fitted by God to enter into the full spirit of this heavenly appointment.

Secondly, the Lord's day is *a day of Rest*. The old Jewish word *Sabbath* signifies "rest." And if you remember, when God first set apart the seventh day, it was to mark His having rested on that day from the great work of creation. It is written, "And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it He had rested from all His work which God created and made."

But it was appointed for *our* sake; that we, who so much need rest might enjoy it. And here we see the great goodness of God—for though He condemned us to hard labor on account of our sin, yet He gave us a weekly *Holyday* to refresh us.

We all need rest. If a laborer were to toil on without any pause, his health would fail, his spirits would flag, his bodily frame

would give way. It is in mercy then to our *bodies* that the Lord, from the very first, appointed a resting-day from labor; and in mercy also to our *souls*. For do not our Sundays often come very seasonably to call us back from our worldliness? How needful are they to remind us of our Father in heaven, and of our Home above! And how sweet to the Christian traveller are these weekly stages in his course, as he journeys onward to a better country!

It is remarkable, that during the time of the French Revolution, some seventy years ago, when many things that were right were overturned, and a lawless and ungodly spirit reigned throughout the land, the Lord's Day in France was set aside. But it was soon found that, even for the body's sake, a resting day was absolutely needful; and one day in *ten* was publicly appointed for that purpose. But this lasted only for a short time, and men soon discovered that God had chosen wisely for them; and they gladly returned to the seventh day of rest, which he had so mercifully ordained.

I feel assured that no one who reads this book would think of putting on his *working*

clothes, and doing his *usual labor*, on the Lord's Day. He would feel it to be a direct insult to God. He would expect a curse to rest upon him, if he thus broke the Lord's command. And yet for money *some* will work. For gain *some* will dare to set aside the solemn command of God.

There is a large amount of buying and selling carried on in some parts of London. And if we could visit some of the back streets of that great city on the Sabbath, we should find much to shock our minds. And then, on our Canals and Railway Lines, how fearfully is the sacredness of the Lord's Day broken in upon! How many are travelling simply for their own convenience, not from necessity! And how many poor men are forced to labor for the selfish gratification of others! It has been lately ascertained that 70,000 persons are employed in connexion with railway travelling on Sundays: 70,000 men are compelled to break the plain command of God! And let us remember that each individual traveller, who needlessly takes part in this Sabbath desecration, is himself guilty of breaking that law by which he will one day

be judged; nay, more, he is guilty of causing others to break it; and their blood will be upon him.

But why do I speak of this? My voice will not reach those who are the instigators in this system of Sabbath-breaking. And if it did reach them, it would be no easy matter to bring conviction home to the consciences of men who act in a body. When "hand joins in hand," there is a sort of feeling that guilt will go "unpunished." But I speak for your sake. Oh, do not take the smallest part in this ungodly act. It may be more *convenient* for you to make a journey on the Lord's Day. And why so? Because you can do it without neglecting your ordinary work. Because you can do it, and yet appear to the world as if you revered God's Sabbath. Ah! but you cannot do it without pouring contempt on God's ordinance, and putting your own pleasure or convenience before His will.

I know there are times when necessity is laid upon us, and then the act is allowable. But let us satisfy ourselves that *it is absolutely necessary*, or else as Christians we must refrain.

Again, I know how difficult it is for a poor man to leave his home on any other day. However, let him look at the matter conscientiously, and I am sure he will be guided to do what is right.

But when I say that God's day is a day of *rest*, I do not mean to speak merely of travelling or laboring on that day. There are other works besides those that meet the eye, which are an offence to God. The Master, for instance, who takes no pains to relieve his servant from labor, but sees him staying away from the Lord's house that he may mind his earthly concerns; the man who makes Sunday a day for letter-writing, or for newspaper-reading, or for making up accounts; he dishonors God by this sort of work quite as much as the more open Sabbath-breaker.

And this leads me to the *Third* point which I mentioned; namely, that whilst Sunday is a resting-day, it should also be a *busy day* to the Christian, a day for holy employments. A person may abstain from work. He may carefully avoid employing others to work. And yet the day may be anything

but a sacred day to him. It may be a day of worldliness, or a day of idleness. He may do nothing to help his soul forward towards heaven.

The earnest Christian will feel that this is the great *preparation-day* for a better world; the great *sowing season*; the great *ripening time* for the future harvest. I have already shown you that the Word of God and Prayer are special helps to us in the Christian Life. No child of God can live without them. And here we have another help which God has mercifully given us, His sabbaths, when much work may be done for heaven.

And what are the particular employments to which we are called on the Lord's Day?

Congregational worship is the great employment of the day. We meet for *business* on other days, in the market-place, or in the field, or in the work-shop. We meet our friends, at the *family meal*. We meet, most of us, I hope, for *family worship*. But on Sunday the doors of the Lord's House are thrown open, and every individual in each parish is invited to come together for joint worship.

Oh, must it not be a sight at which angels rejoice, to see crowds of worshippers pressing into the courts of the Lord? Rank is, or ought to be forgotten; little disagreements laid aside; the world thrust back for a season. We meet for Prayer, as brethren, to pray together, to pray for each other, to kindle the flame of devotion in one another's hearts, to confess our sins as with one voice, to put up our petitions together to God's throne, to sing the praises of Him whom we love, and to receive that message from heaven which God is pleased to send us.

How can any one be absent at such a time? How can any content themselves with coming once, when they might come twice? Some think the Prayers too long; others think the Sermon too searching. But, if your heart is right with God, you will love His house, as David loved it: "A day in thy courts is better than a thousand." See how, amidst his tears, he thought of those blessed seasons he had spent in the sanctuary: "I went with the multitude to the house of God, with a multitude that kept holy-day."

I think that by a little effort, and with a

little management, some who come once a day might perhaps come oftener. With some I know it is almost impossible. But just ask yourself, Could I not so arrange it as to be oftener present in the house of my God? And, when there, put as much *heartiness* as you can into the service. Let us *pray* heartily; *respond* heartily; *sing* heartily; *receive* heartily the Word into our souls. Let it be the service of the whole heart, and not of the lips only.

Besides Public Worship, there is also the Lord's Supper to which we are called. But of this I hope to speak at large in another chapter.

These are the more public ordinances which belong to the Sabbath. But there are many hours which we spend at home with our families, or alone. And much depends on the way in which they are spent. If they are passed in idleness, or in a worldly manner, then the blessing we may have received in God's house will soon be lost. If our hearts have been warmed there, they will soon grow cold again; and God's work of grace will be undone by our neglect.

Let Public Prayer be followed up by Closet Prayer. Let the seed sown from the Pulpit be watered at home by drawing near to the Throne of Grace, by imploring God's blessing, and by a devout reading of His Word. I am sure that our happiness during the week greatly depends on the way in which our Sunday hours are spent. If we merely attend to outward ordinances, and then put religion aside for the rest of the day, there will be no growth in grace, no victory over our sinful selves, no ripening for heaven.

There is one more point I wish to speak of; and that is, the *Joy and Happiness* which belong to the Lord's Day.

It is a great mistake to look upon it as a mournful day, a day on which we should hang down our heads, and banish joy from our hearts. What! is that a mournful day, which is more like heaven than all other days? Is that a gloomy invitation, which bids us gather round our Father's throne? Is that a sorrowful message, which declares that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself?" We dishonor the

Gospel, if we think it necessary to put on a sad countenance when we press its claims. The true Christian is the happiest man upon earth. And of all days this will be the day on which his soul will experience the completest joy; and of all places the sanctuary will be the place in which he feels the purest delight. It was so with David; "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord;" "Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise;" "I went with the multitude to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday." And thus it should be with every Christian. Say to yourself then, as each Sunday comes, "This is the Christian's *Holiday*." "This is the day the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it." And whilst the worldly man exclaims, "Behold, what a weariness is it!" "When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the Sabbath that we may set forth wheat?" ask God to give you a Sabbath blessing, to tune your heart for His service, and to fulfil His word in your experience; "I will make them *joyful* in my house of prayer."

May God in mercy pardon all that has been wrong in our past Sundays! And may we put up an earnest prayer that He will in future make them more profitable and more blessed days to us!

CHAPTER XI.

PUBLIC WORSHIP, THE OUTBURST OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

THE meeting together of God's people for *Public Prayer* seems to have been always observed. We can certainly trace it back as far as the time of the Israelites, above three thousand years ago. By the command of God, they used to meet together in a Building set apart for His worship. This Building was called the Tabernacle. It was a kind of movable tent, just suited to the wants of the Israelites, during their journeyings from place to place in the wilderness. Here it was the delight of every pious Jew to meet his fellow-worshippers, and to draw near with them to the throne of grace. David, in his Psalms, often speaks of the great joy and comfort he felt in going up to the House of the Lord. He exclaims, in Psalm lxxxiv., "How amiable are thy

tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God."

Soon after the days of David, the Temple was built at Jerusalem. This was a much more substantial building. It was something like one of our great Cathedrals, only much larger, and more magnificent. In this temple all the scattered Jews used to meet together at certain times in the year to offer up prayers and sacrifices.

When our Lord came upon earth, the Temple was still standing. And besides, there were several other smaller places of worship called Synagogues, both at Jerusalem and in the other Jewish towns. In the Gospels we often read of Jesus and His followers being present in these Houses of Prayer.

The very first thing that the Disciples did after their Lord's departure from them into heaven, was to meet for Public Prayer; Acts, i. 12, 13, 14. Such too was their constant custom afterwards. And we find St. Paul exhorting the Hebrews, "not to forsake the assembling of themselves together."

So you see that Public Prayer is a scriptural duty. And can you not say that it has been to you a most delightful duty, a pleasure, a joy, a blessed privilege? Has not this again and again been the feeling of your heart, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the House of the Lord?" Have you not sometimes gone to God's house with a heavy heart; and come away lightened? Have you not gone there, mourning over the coldness and dullness of your feelings; and come home warmed and comforted? The dew of God's grace has fallen upon your soul, and refreshed it. The Sun of Righteousness has risen upon you, and every cloud has been dispersed.

There is certainly a *special* blessing promised to us in Public Worship. Where a few are gathered together in the Saviour's name, there He pledges Himself, as we have seen, to be in the midst of us; Matt. xviii. 20. Surely we can have but little faith, or we should look for a much larger flow of spiritual mercies in the House of God.

But let me say a few words about *the*

manner in which we should conduct ourselves in our public devotions.

First. Let me remind you that we meet in the house of God *to pray*. Remember, it is written, "My house shall be called a *House of Prayer*." But can it be necessary that I should remind you of this? Alas! it is necessary. Some go only to hear the sermon. Some go to stare about them. And others, like so many machines, go through the mere form of worship.

I was lately reading of a person who had been travelling among the Calmucs (a Russian tribe). At the entrance of some of their huts he observed a kind of small wind-mill. He inquired for what purpose they were put there; and he was told that they were "praying-machines." The owner of the hut causes certain prayers to be written by the priests; and they are then turned round by the wind, which saves him the trouble of repeating them himself.

A Christian wonders at such absurdities. But in the conduct of these poor ignorant Calmucs, may he not see something like a picture of his own conduct? The devotions of too many Christians are but little

better. It seems to be quite enough with some to make their appearance in God's house. They hold a Prayer-book in their hand ; and this is to them what the praying-machine is to the Calmuc. They seem almost to expect it to pray for them, and to bring down from heaven all the blessings they need, without any trouble or concern of their own. Before then you smile at the poor ignorant Calmuc's devotions, see that your own are what they ought to be. It is not enough to listen to the prayers, or to read them ever so attentively in your Prayer-book. You should *pray the prayers*. You should make them your own. Be not a mere listener in God's house, but a worshipper.

Secondly. Be careful about your *posture*. Ours is not, I know, a mere bodily service, but a spiritual one. It is the service of the heart. But still, a lowly posture of the body is fit for those who are approaching God.

If you will take the trouble to look out the following passages, you will clearly see that *kneeling* was the posture observed by the people of God in scripture times:

Exodus, iv. 31; xxxiv. 8; Psalm xcv. 6; 1 Kings, viii. 54; Dan. vi. 10; Luke, xxii. 41; Acts, vii. 60; ix. 40; xx. 36; xxi. 5. *Standing* however seems to have been allowable; Mark, xi. 25; Luke, viii. 11, 13.

But go into our churches, and what do you find? You see the greater part of the congregation, not kneeling, not even standing, but actually *sitting at their ease*, during the solemn act of prayer! Alas, how wrong! How useless to call ourselves "miserable sinners," and yet to approach God in such a way as this! Surely our people will never worship God *inwardly*, as long as they thus despise Him *outwardly*.

Have you been hitherto one of the sitting part of the congregation? Then I solemnly and affectionately warn you not to dishonor God any more. Though many around you sit, do you kneel, or at least stand. No matter, if you should act differently from the rest of those in your pew; you will be acting rightly. No matter if some should jeer you; your conscience will tell you that you are right. And sometimes, you know, we must meet with reproaches for our Master's sake. How happy it would make me,

if I could watch you reading this book, and then follow you to church next Sunday, and see you *on your knees* before God! May He give you strength to do what is pleasing in His sight!

Thirdly. Join heartily in all the prayers. In some parts of the service only the voice of the minister ought to be heard. In these you should pray silently and secretly, but still you should pray *fervently*. But there are other parts in which all should pray aloud. And what a life and warmth it gives to our services, when this is heartily done. Supposing that all, with one heart and voice, should pray, when they are required to pray; praise, when they are required to praise; and sing, when they are required to sing; what would be the effect? What a change would then take place in our public worship! There would be no complaint then of the want of heart, and life, in our solemn services. *Then*, as St. Paul says, if there should come in "one that believeth not, or one unlearned," he would indeed be "convinced of all;" and, falling down on his face, he would worship God, and would report that God was in us of a truth.

Yes, this would be delightful indeed. And how can it be brought about? Not by empty wishes. Not by sighs after a better state of things. A congregation is composed of different members. *You* are one. Let *your* prayers, in the house of God, be henceforth more earnest. Let *your* voice of prayer and praise be *heard* in the congregation.

Fourthly. Keep your heart fixed on God. Have you not sometimes felt quite ashamed, when the service is ended, to think how little you have prayed; and how sadly your mind has wandered away from God? Have you not found that the most worldly, and the most trifling, thoughts will creep in, if they are not forcibly shut out? This shows what corrupt and fallen creatures we are. The world follows us to the very house of God. It clings to us, even when we are before His throne. Watch against this. Strive against it. Pray against it.

Lastly. Avoid all light, vain, and worldly conversation both in going to God's house, and in returning from it. If you go to church in a devout and prepared state of mind, you will find that this is the surest

way to enjoy a peaceful and holy frame during the service. How often we have seen a person come in late and hurried! It is quite impossible that he can bring his mind to engage at once in the solemn work of prayer. Perhaps, for the last half-hour, he has been thinking of his dress, or has been engaged in some worldly matter; and thus he rushes into the presence of his God. No wonder if his heart is far away. No wonder if the world, instead of God, is in all his thoughts. It is very important then to try and get *your* heart right *beforehand*, by drawing near to God in your closet and asking Him to be specially with you in His House.

And then, after the service, how is it usually with us? The congregation breaks up, and the doors open; and too many, as they walk home, begin almost immediately to talk about the most trifling matters. To hear them, one would little guess that they had been to the house of prayer. God is forgotten; heavenly things are put aside; and the good seed of His Word choked. Beware of this; for Satan thus draws off multitudes of souls. "Keep thy heart with all diligence."

May there be more praying people in our congregations! May God put more life into our services! May our confessions be more heartfelt, our petitions more earnest, our praises more lively, and our hearing more childlike! May we say of God's House, "Surely the Lord is in this place. This is none other but the House of God, and this is the gate of heaven!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE HOLY COMMUNION, THE BOND OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

THE Christian Church consists of "all who profess and call themselves Christians"—all who have been baptized. This is a large circle, and includes every one who names the name of Christ.

But, besides this, there is also an *inner* circle, which takes in only those who are really Christ's people, those whom He looks upon as His own elect.

The Jews of old all belonged to God's Church. The whole nation were called His people. "To them belonged the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises." The Lord treated them as His children; "Israel is my son, my firstborn." But only a few of them were true Believers. There was only a little rem-

nant according to the election of grace. "They are not all Israel," as St. Paul says, "who are of Israel." And so all are not true Christians who belong to Christ's outer household. Thus in the Apostles' Creed we say, "I believe in the Holy Catholic Church;" that is, I believe in the great Body of Professing Christians. And then we add, "I believe in the Communion of Saints;" that is, the Company of true Believers.

But how difficult for us to discern between God's *professing people* and His *real people*! Several years ago, there was a census taken of the population of this country. But suppose it had been directed that, in the return to be made, it should be specified who were God's saints, and who were not—shall I say, How *hard* it would have been,—rather I would say, How *impossible* it would have been to mark them! The Lord Himself only "knoweth them that are His." We may *think*, we may *judge*, we may *form our opinions*; but we dare not *pronounce* who are of God, and who are of the world, Nay, our Lord seems to caution us against making the attempt; for in the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares, when the servants

propose to the master of the harvest-field, "Wilt thou that we go and gather up the tares?" he replies, "Nay, lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them."

Still there is the *inner* circle, the precious wheat, the little flock. God has His saints upon *earth*, as well as in *heaven*. And the good Shepherd says, "I know my sheep, and am known of mine."

Happy those, who can in the secret of their hearts feel that, unworthy as they are, they have been received into the fold—who have an humble assurance that God does number them among His people—whose conscience bears witness that their one chief desire is to serve God with all their hearts, and to live a Christian life.

It is to help such on their difficult journey, to cheer them and strengthen by the way, that the Lord has given His Word to nourish them, a Throne of Grace where they may apply for help, the Sabbath to rest them, His House as a place of refreshment; and, further, His Body and Blood to give new life from time to time to their souls.

Now, our subject for this chapter is the Lord's Supper. And I shall speak of it,

1. As the Bond which binds God's people together.

2. As a Mark of Discipleship.

3. As a most important Means of grace.

I shall afterwards give you a few directions as to the spirit in which we should receive it.

1. We will speak of the Lord's Supper as *the Bond which binds God's people together.*

His people are scattered about the world. Some are here, and some at the other extremity of the globe. Some are poor, and some rich. In many ways they are separated from each other. But yet there is a oneness about them, which nothing can break. "We being many," says the apostle, "are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another," separated as members of the world, but united as members of Christ.

It is well to think of this union, and try and realize it. When we hear of any one, for instance, loving and serving God, it is good to feel, he is my Brother. When we

are told of a person being drawn from the path of sin, and brought to Christ, it is a comfort to think that another member is added to God's happy family. When a true Believer dies in the Lord, there is something very sweet in the thought that another sheep of the flock is safely folded.

It is our privilege, if we are true Christians, to feel this ; and we ought to feel it—that we are not alone, but that we are members of a great Christian Brotherhood, and that we shall one day be together in the many mansions of our Father's House.

But there is a time, when Christians are specially reminded of this happy union ; I mean when they meet together at the Lord's Table. There is something in a meal which draws us closely together, and binds us to one another. And this is a heavenly meal, a spiritual feast. "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?" Is it not a partaking together of the benefits of Christ's blood-shedding? "The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" "Is it not a feeding together on His body?" "For we being many are one

bread, and one body : for we are all partakers of that one bread." We feed upon Christ; and thus become united to Him and to one another; we become one loaf as it were, one bread and one body. We are like so many vine-branches, feeding together on the same spiritual Vine; so many limbs or members, clinging to Christ, the living Head.

Here is a bond indeed, which should make us feel that we are *one*—one in our misery and helplessness—and one too in having Christ as the only Saviour, to whom we all alike owe our salvation.

And here let me speak of a temptation, by which Satan sometimes sends a chill into our hearts. He perhaps whispers to us, "They are not all God's true people who meet at His Table. There are some formalists there, some who have only a name to live, some who are wearing the mere mark of the Gospel." Yes, and so it is perhaps. But we have nothing to do with this. We are told in God's Word to "judge nothing before the time." We are exhorted to exercise that charity which "believeth all things, hopeth all things;" and "in lowli-

ness of mind to esteem other better than ourselves." Ah, that is a cold, withering, unhappy, unchristian feeling, which leads a person to be looking into other hearts rather than his own, and to judge harshly of his brother's state. Remember, there was a Judas among the Twelve, a false apostle among the true ones; and who knows but that he was one to whom the Saviour gave the bread and wine in the Passover Supper Room? Remember, too, that the Lord's Table is spread on *earth*, and not in *heaven*; and we shall never find perfection here. Let us come together, then, as members of one family, knit together in love, drawn towards each other by a holy bond of brotherly affection. This is the spirit which becomes those who are groaning under the same load of sin, and are looking to the same Saviour, and to the same blessed Home.

2. We may regard the Lord's Supper as a *Mark of Discipleship*. I have already said, that *all* who partake of the Holy Communion are not Christ's disciples. We may eat the bread and drink the wine, and yet have no part with Christ. But, still, to

come to His Table is as much as to declare oneself His follower; it is as much as to say that we cast in our lot among His people, and that we feed on Him as the Bread of our souls. We become full members of His Church, when having been confirmed we partake of this ordinance. Christ bids us come, and by accepting His invitation we declare our willingness to be His.

It is well to look at the Lord's Supper in this light. It is well to consider it as a *mark of allegiance* to our Lord.

Let those who *never* come lay this to heart. Here is a public act, which my Lord bids me engage in, an act by which I may enroll myself among His people. But I stand afar off, and obey not His loving call.

And let those who *do* come lay it also to heart. It is my high privilege to draw near to my Redeemer, to partake of this most blessed of all ordinances. Then let me live accordingly. Let my life, my conduct, my feelings, my words, be those of a disciple who loves his Lord. Let me ever remember whose I am, and to whose service I have joyfully pledged myself.

3. We may look upon the Lord's Supper as a most important *Means of Grace*.

It is something, if by coming to this Feast we are only reminded of our Lord's death. It is something, if by so doing we are bound more strongly to one another. It is something, if we thus make an open confession of Christ. But, *further*, we must not forget that it is an ordinance by which God gives *fresh grace* to our needy souls. Are we sorrowful? Here is a comfort for us. Are we weak? Here is strength. Are we sore let and hindered in running our Christian race? Here is a help by the way. Do we long for the Saviour to be nearer to us? Here we are brought close to Him. "The cup of blessing which we bless; is it not *the communion of the blood of Christ*? The bread which we break, is it not *the communion of the body of Christ*? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread." As we say in our Communion service, "We dwell in Christ, and Christ in us; we are one with Christ, and Christ with us."

When you kneel at that Table, think of Christ. Receive Him into your hearts

by faith. Feed upon Him. Believe that a blessing is there, and open your hearts to receive it.

Thus I have endeavored to show you how much there is in this heavenly banquet which our Lord has provided for us; how it meets all our wants; how it ought to bind us to one another; how bold it ought to make us in confessing Christ; what a refreshment it ought to be to our poor, hungry souls.

I often think, that considering the state of our congregations, the number of our communicants ought to be larger than it is. If they were in a dead, careless, unawakened state, then we should look for few at the Lord's Table. But that is not generally the state of our congregations. Blessed be God, there is life among us; there is earnestness among us. There are many, I believe, who come to the House of God who have deep convictions, strong feelings in their hearts, a real desire to be saved; and yet even some of these stay away; and others come but seldom.

What is it that keeps them back? Is it

fear? Is it want of decision? Is it the notion that we can be saved as well without the ordinance as with it? If it is the first of these, namely, *a fear that we are not fit*, this is a serious reason and ought to be considered. Now, there are many whom I would not think of urging to come to the Lord's Table; namely, those who love sin, those who are careless about the things of God, those who see no preciousness in Christ, those who are trying to save *themselves*, instead of looking to the salvation offered in the Gospel. To such I would say, Come first to Christ; give your heart to Him; and *then* come to His Table.

But are there not some in whose hearts there is a true sorrow for sin, and a real desire to take Christ for their Saviour; and yet we never see them among our communicants? To such I would say, If you love Christ, though you feel that you do not love Him enough, come to the Feast which He has so graciously provided. Come, that you may love Him more. Come, that your faith may be strengthened. Come, that you may obtain the very help which you need.

Or if it is *want of decision* which keeps

you back, how sad it is that any should have good thoughts and feelings about salvation, and yet should halt and hang back, and thus run the risk of losing all, even heaven itself. If you are one of these waverers, leave at once the false and uncertain ground on which you are now standing. It will not bear your weight, if trials come. It will not support you, when death stares you in the face. Stand boldly forward. "If the Lord be God, follow Him, but if Baal, then follow him." If you wish Christ to be your Saviour, do not dishonor Him by your half-heartedness; but give Him all your love and all your service; and let your *first* act of decision be to come to this precious ordinance.

Or, once more, if some have the idea that they can be serving Christ, whether they join in this sacrament or not, they are under a fatal mistake. For does not our Lord say, "Do this?" and yet they do it not. It is one of our Saviour's plain commands, which we can only disobey at our great peril. To stay away from the Lord's Table is to live in a state of disobedience—it is to put from us an offered blessing—to try and

do without that which He has declared needful for us. For He says, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, there is no life in you." No, dear friends, we cannot do without this holy ordinance. We cannot neglect it, and yet grow in grace and holiness.

Let me now offer you a few directions.

1. When you come to the Lord's Table, raise your thoughts upwards, and *fix them on Christ*. You remember that, in the Service, the Minister says to you, "Lift up your hearts;" and you reply, "We lift them up unto the Lord."

Endeavor to do so. When you take the bread and wine into your mouth, think of Him who is your spiritual Bread, and feed on Him by faith. He is in heaven; and thither must your heart ascend.

2. When you are assembled with your brethren at the Holy Communion, try and feel that "we are members one of another," and that we belong to a great Family for whom Christ died. Ask God to kindle a feeling of real brotherly love in your heart.

3. When you draw near to the Saviour's

Feast, come to it with an humble, but at the same time a *thankful*, heart. Remember, the Communion Service is a Service of gratitude and thankfulness. How full of joy, for instance, are those words in it, "Therefore with angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify Thy glorious name, evermore praising Thee." And again, towards the end of the Service, "Glory be to God on high, and in earth peace, good will towards men. We praise Thee, we bless Thee, we worship Thee, we glorify Thee, we give Thee thanks for Thy great glory, O Lord God, heavenly King, God the Father Almighty."

Let us try then, on these occasions, to waken up all our thankful feelings. Blessed Feast, which reminds us of our pardon, our acceptance, and our full redemption! Blessed Feast, which binds us closer to our Lord, and closer to one another! Happy those who eat bread and drink wine with the Saviour here: they will soon be called to a higher Feast above, even to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb in heaven!

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HOLY SPIRIT, THE SEAL OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

THE descent of the Holy Ghost upon the early followers of our Lord, was the great object to which He specially directed their thoughts. And in accordance with this promise, the Spirit came down on the day of Pentecost, in all the fulness of His power, to bless and give life to the Christian Church.

Now, it was promised by our Lord that the Holy Spirit should *abide* with us—not merely visit us for a time, but continue and remain with us. And He does now actually dwell in the hearts of all God's people. He is as truly present with them as He was with the Disciples on the day of Pentecost. And if we cannot see this, and believe it, what is it but a sad proof that we are still in our worldly state; not taught of God,

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and not under the influence of His grace? For does not the Saviour Himself, when speaking of the Holy Spirit, say, "Whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him; but *ye* know Him, for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you!"

I would ask those who deny the Spirit's influence, just to consider this—

Is it not most clearly told us in Scripture, that our Lord promised to bestow the gift of the Spirit upon His people?

Is it not clear that the Holy Ghost *did* descend upon the Disciples ten days after our Lord's Ascension?

And again, is it not clear that, in the Acts and Epistles, Christians are spoken of as having the Holy Spirit in their hearts; nay, that if they are not led by the Spirit, they are not, and cannot be, the true children of God?

But some have the notion in their minds, that the Holy Spirit is with the Church *generally*, but that He does not work in *individual* hearts. They do not, and cannot, deny His presence and His power in the world; but they will not allow that He

carries on a special work in the Believer's soul. This they look upon as all fancy and enthusiasm. They are willing to pray in church, as we have been praying this morning, "Almighty God, cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the *inspiration of Thy Holy Spirit*, that we may perfectly love Thee." But they would perhaps think it folly to kneel down alone in their own private chambers, and pour out their hearts to God, saying, "O Lord, give *me* Thy Holy Spirit to dwell within *me*; and fill *me* with His blessed inspiration."

Believe me, it is not enough to acknowledge that every true Church must have the Holy Spirit present with it, or it cannot be a *living* Church; but we must have the same Holy Spirit, *each one of us*. In fact, if you and I have not God's Holy Spirit working in our hearts, dwelling there at this moment, we are not real living Christians; there is something we lack, something without which we cannot be the true people of God.

This is a solemn thought. Oh, that none of us may deceive ourselves! We may be regular church-goers, regular Bible-readers,

regular at our private prayers, of upright and honest lives; and so far all is well. But if our hearts are not the temple, the abode, the dwelling-place, of the Holy Ghost—if His presence and power are not felt deep in our souls—if He is not there, leavening our whole inner man—then we fall short of being genuine Christians; there is no life in us.

This is too important a matter to be put aside with a mere passing thought. Let us then seriously consider, what are the *signs* of the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. I will mention *four*.

1. *Earnestness as regards salvation.* One would think that the salvation of a person's soul would be the first, the chief, the greatest concern with every one. But is it so? We see this person eager about making money. We see another full of anxiety about his family. A third is very desirous to improve his health. But seldom, very seldom, do we find men filled with concern about their *souls*. We sometimes say, "When a man gets older, he will become thoughtful." But this by no means follows as a matter

of course. How often we see persons drawing near to the very brink of the grave, still careless and unconcerned. The world is leaving them; but they still love it, and cling to it, to the very last. Truly we need the Holy Spirit's quickening, awakening power to rouse us from our sleep, and make us seek salvation in real earnest.

2. *The enlightening of the mind.* Being naturally blind as regards heavenly things, we must be taught of God, and a light from above must shine in upon our souls, before we can even understand God's truth. If any one wishes to see this plainly stated, let him quietly read over 1 Corinthians, ii. We are there told, concerning "the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him," that is, the good things which the Christian enjoys now that "eye" hath not seen them, nor ear heard them. "But," the Apostle says, "God *hath* revealed them unto us by His Spirit; for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God." And, a few verses on, he speaks still more plainly; "The natural man," he says, "receiveth not the things of the

Spirit of God, neither *can* he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

I will go even further, and observe that a person may know a great deal, and get hold of the outside of the Gospel, and yet, for want of the Spirit's grace and teaching, his mind may be in darkness still. You may learn in childhood that God is love; and yet you may grow up utterly disregarding Him, and you may even die blaspheming Him! You may be acquainted with the holiest truths, and be able to speak learnedly about them; and yet you may be a wretched man. You may have this text upon your lips, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved;" and yet you may neglect His salvation all your days. But, when God teaches by His Holy Spirit, He teaches *the heart*; He enlightens *the very soul*.

3. Another sign of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit will be *Love to God and to His people*. The Spirit changes the heart of man, and raises it up from earth to heaven. He not only teaches us that we *ought* to love God, but draws our hearts towards Him. "The love of God" as the Apostle says, "is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy

Spirit which is given us." And so it is with love to *His people*. The Holy Spirit not only shows us that it is our *duty* to love them; but He sows the *seeds of love* within us. Our hearts are drawn out towards our heavenly Father's children; "By this we know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren."

4. I will mention one more sign, and that a sure and unfailing sign, of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in a soul; and that is *Holiness*. Where the Holy Spirit is, there will be holiness; a love for holiness; a striving after holiness; a gradual growth in holiness; the bringing every thought, and desire, and feeling, into subjection to the will of God. We may mistake nature for grace. We may mistake the outside of religion for that which is inward and real. But when we see a holy man—one walking with God, and doing everything to His glory—this we cannot mistake; it is, and must be, God's own work in the soul.

Now, take these four signs, and examine your own heart. Are you *earnestly concerned* about your soul's salvation? Is your

mind *enlightened*? Do you see heavenly truths much more clearly than you once saw them? Do you *love God your Saviour and His people*? And lastly, are you walking in the path of *holiness*? Then, if so, do not doubt but that God's Holy Spirit has taken up His abode within you.

But there is an expression to which I must in conclusion call your attention—the sealing of the Holy Spirit. In Eph. i. 13, St. Paul says, “After that ye believed ye were *sealed* with that Holy Spirit of promise.” We find the same thing spoken of in two other passages of Scripture. In chap. iv. 30, of the same Epistle, St. Paul says, “Grieve not the Holy Spirit, whereby ye are *sealed* unto the day of redemption.” And in 2 Cor. i. 22, it is written, “God hath also *sealed* us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.”

What is this sealing? We must not look for it in the case of the unconverted, but in those who are true Believers; for the Apostle says, “*After* that ye believed, ye were sealed.” It is an after work, by which the Believer is confirmed and strengthened in his faith. Just as when any paper or docu-

ment is drawn up, we are in the habit of signing our name at the end of it, and then we put our seal upon it, in order to show that we acknowledge it, and make it ours, so God by His Holy Spirit sets His stamp upon believers, and marks them for His own.

We often see God's people full of doubt and uncertainty whether they are accepted or not. Their hearts are turned heavenward; they love Christ, and wish to serve Him. But they do not feel happy. Their footing is not firm. There is a work of grace within them; but they seem to lack something. What is it? Not a voice from heaven, to tell them that God is their Father; not a vision of the night, to remove all doubt: no, this is not God's way of dealing. What they want is more of the Holy Spirit—a deeper work in their souls—they want this *sealing*, which is spoken of in Scripture. And often God is pleased to give this, under the preaching of the Word, or in reading of a chapter of the Bible. Some promise is brought by the power of the Holy Spirit, *and sealed upon the heart*. And thus the soul is led into the full assurance

of understanding and of faith. The Believer feels that he is welcome, and that he is indeed one of God's adopted children. How blessed thus to have our way cleared, our doubts removed, our slavish fear calmed, and under the drawings of eternal love to approach God as a reconciled Father!

No one who reads the New Testament can fail to see that this was the bright and happy feeling of true Believers in former days. And this it was that made them strong, and enabled them to go through the world as men who had "made their calling and election sure."

Look at St. Paul saying, "But I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe." Did he not mean that all, who should believe like him, might rejoice as he rejoiced? He would not shut out *one* from that blessed source of joy to his own soul—the power of saying, "But I have obtained mercy."

Again, did not the early Christian Believers speak in language of the greatest confidence, and say, "We are of God"—

"We are fellow-citizens of the saints and of the household of God"—once "darkness," now "light in the Lord?" And may not *we* speak with the same holy, humble confidence? May not we take to ourselves the comfort that *we* are *actually* and *really* adopted into God's family.

Yes, we may. And it is moreover the duty and the privilege of every Believer among us diligently and prayerfully to seek for this assurance of faith, this *sealing of the Spirit*. It is not an imaginary blessing: it is a real one, and it may be ours. Be not satisfied with a dim hope; or rest content with a past experience. Apply for a *present* pardon, a *present* sense of acceptance, a *present* salvation, a *present* Christ to rejoice in, and to live upon.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE, A DAILY PROGRESS.

IN the fourth chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians, the Apostle speaks of the Christian Church. In the 4th, 5th, and 6th verses, he describes its *oneness*; "There is one body and one spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." In the following verses he shows how abundantly Christ has provided for the *growth and strength* of His Church; "Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. And he gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers." And all this that our spiritual growth might be as sure and gradual as the growth of our

bodies ; " For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ ; till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man (or a full-grown man), unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

If you watch a child, you will see how from year to year his stature gradually increases, till he attains to the perfection of a full-grown man. But if he remains stationary—if year after year his limbs gather no strength—if there is no growth—then the conclusion you come to is that something is wrong. There is clearly something wanting, or something which interferes with the usual course of nature.

So is it with the Christian. When there is no advance, no growth in grace, no spiritual progress, something must be wrong. It is not God's will that it should be so. He would not have us always to be mere *babes* in Christ, always children ; but He desires to see us increasing in our spiritual stature, and advancing to spiritual manhood.

Now, it is against this stuntedness in the Christian growth that the Apostle goes on

to warn us, when he says, "that we henceforth be no more children."

The expression "children," or babes, is sometimes used in a good sense, and sometimes in a bad sense. Truly it is a blessed thing to be *a child* of God ; to be taken out of the family of the world, and to be brought into God's family ; to have a place among His sons and daughters ; to be, as it were, even a little one in His household.

And yet is it not well to remember that we must not be *always* children? I am sorry to say, there are some in the Christian Church, whom we believe to be God's people ; but they never seem to be getting on. There is no running of the Christian race ; but rather a standing still. Instead of moving forward, it seems as much as they can do to keep their ground. They have the same doubts, the same difficulties, the same weakness of faith, the same infirmities of temper, the same feebleness in grappling with temptation, that they had years ago. Their wings are clipped ; they do not fly upwards ; their souls "cleave unto the dust."

And what is the reason of this? God is willing to give. Christ offers a full supply.

There is no lack in Him; the lack is in ourselves. "We have not, because we ask not." If you feel that this is, alas! the case with you, why should it be so a moment longer? Go to Christ with the cry of the needy. Take your empty pitcher to the full Fountain. And then you shall no more have reason to complain, "My leanness! my leanness!"

But this state of spiritual childishness is further described by the apostle in the chapter to which I have referred: "Tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lay in wait to deceive."

The weak Christian is here compared to a tender reed shaken by the wind; or to a ship at sea, tossed about by the waves, or driven forward by the gale; or to a thin fleecy cloud sweeping across the sky on some stormy day. Just so is it with the weak and unstable Christian. There is no firmness and fixedness about him. He is swayed this way and that way, by the first one who tries to persuade him. He is easily led away by the craft and cunning of those

who are always ready to draw aside the wavering.

In St. Paul's days, when there were many false teachers, how needful it was for Christians to be *firmly established* in the truth; to be resting on the one great foundation. And is this less needful now? As soon as any one becomes a real Christian, is he not assailed by enemies on every side—enemies within and without—secret enemies and open enemies? And many a person, who did once run well, has been drawn aside from the right path, and, like a vessel without a rudder, has been driven upon rocks, and has made shipwreck of his faith.

How necessary then that, in our weakness, we should have some strong, solid support on which we may lean. Thank God, as members of a sound Christian Church, we have that support. When in danger of being carried away by any fresh "wind of doctrine," we have the teaching of our Church to fall back upon. We have our Articles and our Liturgy to rest upon, which are based upon the sure Word of God, and have remained firm and unmoved under many a storm.

Ay, and we have a stronger One even than our Church to rely upon. We have a Rock, even Christ; and if we cleave to Him, we shall, and must, be eternally safe. The Apostle points to Him, when he says, that "we may grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ."

I have explained to you this passage at some length. Let me now call your attention to the great lesson which it teaches us; namely, that *the work of grace is a GRADUAL work.*

The Christian begins by being a babe in Christ. There is a childhood in religion. When a soul is quickened and born again of God, everything seems new to it. We are "new creatures; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." *Prayer* is a new thing—real, earnest, heart-prayer. *The Bible* is a new book to us; we see it to be the Word of God; we feel it to be the nourishment of our souls. *The House of God* is a new place to us. *The Sabbath* is a new day to us. Once it was a weariness; now it is our delight. Oh, the joy, the new, fresh joy, that is felt by one who has just "passed from death unto life;"

who has burst the bonds of sin, and has tasted the glorious liberty wherewith Christ makes His children free!

But the young Christian is weak. There is much ignorance and darkness yet about him. He is liable to be misled. His footsteps are apt to slip. He has many lessons yet to learn, and many a battle yet to fight. After a little while, doubts and fears spring up; and these too are new to him, for he never felt them before. He discovers too that his faith is very weak; and this again is something quite new to him; for time was when he never thought about it, or cared about it. And most surely will Satan attack him upon his weakest points. Young Christians, again, are often rash, often set up, often harsh in their judgment of others.

Now we must expect to find such infirmities in those who have newly entered upon their Christian course. And those who are more advanced ought to take them by the hand, and help them in their weakness." Yes, those very Ephesians, to whom St. Paul was writing, were once but "children" in the spiritual life. But the Apostle warns them not to *continue* in this state—"that

we henceforth be no more children," but that we "may grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ." And again he speaks of our growing up into a "perfect man," and arriving at a full Christian stature.

This shows us then that we should be *growing* Christians. Our course should be onward; and our path should be like that of the Sun, "shining more and more unto the perfect day." One stone after another should be added to the Christian Building; and so we should be "built up a spiritual house;" and being "fitly framed together," should "grow into an holy temple." It should be with our souls, as it is with our bodies: we should wax stronger and stronger and every limb should do its appointed work.

This is important. May God enable us to lay it to heart! For remember, if we are true Christians, we shall be *growing Christians*.

1. We should grow in *knowledge*. Knowledge, if it is not accompanied with grace, is worth but little. The Apostle tells us that mere "knowledge puffeth up." But it is *heavenly knowledge* that we should

earnestly seek after. To know ourselves; to know God, and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent; to know the truths of the Gospel; all this is within our reach, for God has revealed it to us in His Word. And the Christian, who studies his Bible with prayer, will become more and more enlightened. He will "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

We must not only desire to be Christians, but to be *wise* Christians, *intelligent* Christians, *enlightened* Christians. Pray for the blessed teaching of the Spirit. Ask Him to "lead you into all truth." Get acquainted with your Bible. Get to know something about the Church to which you belong. Get to understand her doctrines, and see how thoroughly they agree with the Word of God. If you are a Churchman, be an earnest, hearty, intelligent Churchman. Love your Church, and "be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear."

2. We should grow in *faith* too. The more we know of Christ, and the more we experience His love and the greatness of

His salvation, the more simply we should trust Him, and the firmer should be our confidence in Him. We should be ever praying, "Lord, increase our faith." We should desire that Christ "may dwell in our hearts by faith;" and that we "may grow up into Him in all things." We should try and leave the land of doubts and fears, and soar upwards in the full enjoyment of God's presence. The Believer's faith should rest upon a rock, so that nothing can shake it.

3. We should grow in *love*. St. Paul says to the Philippians, "This I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more." And so the Thessalonians, "The Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another." Our love to Christ should be a growing love: and the more of it we possess, the more we shall love His people for His sake.

If this flame of holy love has been kindled in our once cold hearts, is it, I ask, burning brighter, and steadier, and stronger? Do we love our Lord, not merely when our affections are warmed by excitement, but with that constancy and evenness which be-

longs to His true friends? And do we love our Brethern more and more, desiring to do them good both in their souls and bodies, and rejoicing in their welfare?

4. We must grow in *humility*. Ah, there is no surer test of grace than this—are we growing humbler? Is self put down, and Christ exalted in its place? The young Christian is oftentimes a little set up; but the more we know of ourselves and of our Lord, the more lowly will our walk be. The fuller and riper the fruit, the lower do the boughs droop. The seed-corn falls to the ground, whilst the dust that is mixed with it flies aloft before the wind. We often meet in these days with bold Christians, earnest Christians, active Christians. But how rare to meet with a really *humble* Christian! There are such to be found, but, alas, how few! It needed much grace to make St. Paul say, “I am less than the least of all saints;” “God forbid that I should glory save in the cross.”

5. We should grow in *zeal and activity*. It is well to be *doing* something for Christ and His Church. If we would have our bodily limbs increase in vigor, we must

exercise them, we must give them work to do, else they will very soon grow feeble and powerless. And so with our spiritual frame. It is good for our soul's health to work for God. Nothing helps the Christian, and makes him grow, so much as engaging in some active work in the cause of Christ. While he is doing good to others, a blessing is sure to come into his own soul.

6. We should grow in *holiness* and *likeness to Christ*. The sanctifying work of the Spirit is a gradual work. It is often long before we discover our sins, and, when discovered, it is no easy matter to part with them. But if God is really at work in our souls, there will be an increasing hatred of sin, and an increasing desire after holiness. That person has made but little progress on the way to heaven, who has not learned to curb his evil nature, and whose life does not show forth the power and grace of the Gospel.

7. Once more, we must grow in *meetness for heaven*. "It is with the true Believer as it is with the ripening fruit. Though hard at first, its substance grows soft. Though sour and green at first, it becomes

rich and mellow. Though it once was fixed tightly to the tree, when it grows ripe it is ready to drop at the slightest touch. And so is it with the Christian who is growing in grace and ripening for heaven. His heart becomes mellow, and soft, and tender. He is loosed from earth and earthly things. He yields himself readily to the hand of death, and leaves the world without a wrench."

On the other hand, there is some fruit which hangs upon the wall, and never ripens. The showers of heaven descend upon it, the rays of the sun light upon it; but it never ripens. And are there not some, who bear the name of Christ, who are planted as it were in the garden of the Lord, who bask in the very sunshine of His favor, who have every advantage they can need; and yet they never ripen for heaven; they are never ready to die; they will never be fitted for the Master's presence?

Look upon this life as a ripening time for eternity. Lose no opportunity of getting ready for the great change. Sit loose to this world, and live for eternity. Let your "life be hid with Christ in God;"

and then, "when Christ who is our life shall appear, ye shall appear with Him in glory."

Seek to be a growing Christian. Pray that you may grow in knowledge, in faith, in love, in humility, in zeal and activity, in holiness and likeness to Christ, in meetness for heaven.

Happy that Church, that Congregation, that heart, in which this growth is going on! I often think that God has wonderfully blest our Church in the last few years, and is wonderfully blessing it still. I sometimes feel so; but I long for more decided proof of it. And oh! that each one of us may be able to say, "He is indeed blessing *me*. I feel that I am not as I once was. Those things which once were gain to me, I have counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord. For Him I desire to live; for Him I am ready to die; with Him I hope to dwell throughout eternity."

CHAPTER XV.

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE, A DAILY STRUGGLE.

THERE are many struggles going on in the world around us. There are nations groaning under oppression, and struggling for liberty. There are countries at war with one another, each struggling for the mastery. There is many a man, who has been unjustly accused, struggling to prove his innocence. There are persons too, who have been brought low by misfortune, struggling against poverty, and trying hard to raise themselves in the world. All these struggles are going on at this moment.

But there is another struggle, which no one ever yet earnestly engaged in without success. The Bible speaks of it, and calls it "*our* warfare;" that is, the warfare which God's people were then, and are still, engaged in. Let us see,

- I. What is the nature of this warfare?
- II. What are the weapons which we are to use?
- III. What is the object to be gained?

I. *What is the nature of this warfare?* It is a spiritual struggle. "We do not war," says the Apostle, "after the flesh;" or, as he says in another place, "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." It is a conflict with Satan, and with our own evil nature.

There are in the world two great powers—the power of evil and the power of good—the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. These are set one against the other. Satan is ever trying to advance his kingdom, and to get the upper hand. He struck his first blow, when he drew away our first parents from their allegiance to God; and he has tried ever since to mar the Lord's work. And never did he try so hard, as when Jesus appeared in the world on His great errand of redeeming love. He then

dared even to tempt the Son of God Himself, and endeavored to thwart His glorious work. And so now, wherever the Gospel seed is sown, he is ready to pluck it up, or else to scatter tares among the wheat.

Here then is a great spiritual conflict going on in the world, a conflict between the Lord's people and the servants of Satan, between light and darkness, between sin and holiness.

But this is not exactly the conflict of which I am going to speak. There is still another; namely, that inward struggle, which goes on in a person's own heart; not in every *heart*, but in the hearts of *all God's people*. It is an inward and spiritual conflict, which none can feel but those who are under the influence of God's grace. And this is the reason why I have called the spiritual life *a daily struggle*.

When a soul is first awakened, opposition is sure to spring up; opposition from the world, which is unwilling to part with one of its followers; opposition from Satan, who before, like "a strong man armed," had peaceful possession of the soul, and will not now without a desperate effort unloose his

grasp ; and opposition, too, nearer home, in our own heart.

Ah, once there was all ease and quietness within ; there was no disturbance, no anxiety, no concern, no questioning of ourselves. And why ? Because the soul was asleep. But the moment grace began to work, then the struggle was felt. Hear how it was with St. Paul. He tells us, in Rom. vii., how severe the warfare was in his case ; what a conflict there was between his new and spiritual nature, and his old evil nature which still remained within him : " I know," he says, " that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing ; for to will is present with me ; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not : but the evil which I would not, that I do. I find then a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man, but I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members. O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death ? I

thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Here was a violent conflict continually carried on in St. Paul's soul between the old man and the new man, between the flesh and the spirit, between the bad part of his character and the better part. And this it was that led him to say to the Galatians, "The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would."

Is it any wonder then that Christ's people are sometimes sad? Are we surprised that now and then they seem so anxious? It is because there is this great struggle going on in their souls. They earnestly desire to do right; but there is something within which hinders them—something continually pulling them back, when they wish to go forward.

But it may be asked, Is this warfare *always* going on? Is this struggle a *continual* one? There are times, when the Christian is *especially* tried. There are periods in his experience, when the enemy assails him with *unusual* fierceness, when he has to gather up all his strength to

oppose him ; when he is forced to summon all his faith, and to apply earnestly to God for His promised aid. But besides these special occasions when the struggle is severe, there is a lesser warfare *always* going on in the Believer's soul. There is a *daily* struggle—a struggle which lasts all the while we are in this wilderness world, and never ceases till we reach the heavenly Canaan.

Perhaps I am speaking to one who knows and feels that this is the case. Can we ever say that our warfare is accomplished, our journey ended, our race run, as long as we remain here? No, there is always an enemy near, some danger to be guarded against, some evil to be overcome, some fresh gift to be sought. "Not as though I had already attained," says the Apostle, "either were already perfect ; but I follow after." It is a daily "pressing towards the mark."

Such is the great warfare which the Word of God speaks of—a spiritual warfare—a warfare within the soul—a warfare that is always going on, so long, at least, as there is infirmity, temptation, and sin, to be resisted—in short, so long as life lasts.

Let us now inquire,

II. What are *the weapons* with which we fight? We are told that, "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God." They are not such as men of the world use, but what God has provided.

When the followers of the false prophet Mahomet began to spread their religion, they did it by violence : that was a "carnal" weapon. When Peter wished to defend his Master, he drew his sword ; that again was a "carnal" weapon. How different were the weapons which that same Peter and his brother apostles used a few years after, when they won souls to Christ. Look at the sixth chapter of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, and see by what means they gained their victories ; "By pureness, by knowledge, by long-suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness." These were their weapons ; and they were "mighty through God." And these too are the weapons by which hard hearts are broken, and souls won, in these days also.

But I am not speaking now of the work which the minister of Christ is carrying on ; but of that work of grace which is going on in the heart of *every* true Christian. How does he fight the good fight of faith ? Is there a prize to be won, and he must strive for it as best he can ? Is there a warfare to be waged, and he has no weapons but those with which nature provides him ? We might well pity him, if this were the case.

Just suppose a person awakened to the importance of religion, earnestly desiring to serve God, and to reach heaven ; but yet left entirely to his own resources. He feels his faith to be weak ; and how can he strengthen it ? He has powerful enemies ; how can he stand up against them ? He has a sinful, treacherous heart ; how can he subdue and sanctify it ? If left to himself, he would, indeed, soon fail ; and the little spark of religion would soon die within him.

But, thank God, He does not leave His people alone and unprovided. He has bid us seek His help in prayer, and lean upon His grace. He has given us an armor, in which we may subdue every foe, and be "more than conquerors."

Here is our great comfort ; "The Lord of Hosts is with us : the God of Jacob is our refuge." Our dangers and our trials are great ; but not greater than we can bear. When any one is earnestly engaged in fighting the good fight, God's eye is upon that person ; He stands ready to give him the wished-for succor, and to help him according to his need. Sometimes we feel almost disheartened with the toils and difficulties which are before us. Sometimes the way seems very rugged, and the hill very steep. Sometimes our trials seem too great for flesh and blood. Yes, and they would be too great, if we had only flesh and blood to meet them. But there is a Heavenly Helper ; and with His assistance we can master them all. We "can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth us." Oh, then, why should we ever be cast down ? Weak as our own powers are, they will be "mighty through God." Puny as we are in ourselves, we shall be as giants, if like David we go forth in the name of the Lord.

But there is yet another inquiry to make.

III. *What is to be gained by this warfare ?*

What is the Christian's great object, for which he struggles so hard? It is "the pulling down of strongholds;" the "casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God;" the "bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

Here is a glorious work indeed to be accomplished. Here is something to be *demolished*; something to be *kept under*; something to be *won for Christ*. Let me say a word upon each.

There is something to be *demolished*. There are "strongholds" to be "pulled down." Just as in battle there are certain strong fortresses which must be completely destroyed, and levelled with the ground, or there will be no hope of victory; so it is in the Christian warfare. For instance, *the love of the world*, which naturally has possession of our hearts, is one of these strongholds. That must be pulled down, to make way for the love of Christ. *Pride* is another stronghold, which sets itself up in every unconverted heart. That too must be lowered; as it is written, "the lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of

man shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted." In short, *every sin*, which reigns in the unrenewed heart—and every sin too which still strives for the mastery even in the heart that is changed by grace—every such sin must be fought against, and subdued, and destroyed.

Ah, it may be a hard and a long warfare ; but if we fight manfully, and in dependence upon God, we shall succeed at last. For the promise is, "Sin shall not have dominion over you." God "shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly."

Then, there is something to be *kept under*—"casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God."

I am sure, if we know anything of our own hearts, we shall feel that there is a great deal that wants constant curbing there. Our vain thoughts, our vile affections, our unbelief, which are always rising up, and troubling us ; our ignorance, which sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and leads us away from His truth ; all these need to be kept under. And how can we do

this, unless we are ever on our watch, and ever seeking fresh and fresh grace from God? If we attempt it with our weapons, we shall fail. But if we use the grace which God so freely gives, then the victory will be ours.

Once more—there is something to be *won to Christ*; “bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” He claims all our thoughts, and all our hearts; and it is our happiness to give them to Him. But it is no easy matter. And yet it *may* be done. Our weapons are powerful enough to effect it. Let us only strive and pray—strive as those who are really in earnest, and pray as those who feel that prayer is their strength—and we shall find that one thought after another, and one desire after another, will by degrees be subdued, and brought as a prisoner to Christ.

Happy those who are thus winning spiritual victories; who are learning to control their tempers, their wills, their desires; and are gradually bringing every feeling of the heart into sweet submission to their Lord!

And now I will close this subject with two short directions.

The first is, *Learn to look on the Christian life as a DAILY struggle.* Do not expect it to be all smooth and easy. Be prepared for many a conflict. Enter heartily upon this warfare.

How is it as regards earthly things? Who are those who succeed in the world, who win, who gain the prize? The Strong Man, who gives himself vigorously to his work; the Student, who reads and studies that he may outstrip his fellows; the dauntless Sailor, who defies the storm, at the risk of his life runs up the rigging to obey his Captain's orders; the Soldier, who at the sound of the bugle rushes from the trenches, springs into the deadly breach, and fights his way on and on, till his flag waves in victory above the smoke of battle.

And so, it is the Christian who is earnest in faith, and strong in prayer, who wins the battle of the Lord. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force."

My other direction is this—Whatever special work you engage in, remember that

you need a strength better than your own ; and that strength will be granted, if only you apply for it. Are you anxious to do some good to others, to win a brother's soul, or to comfort a mourner's heart? Do you want to overcome some one of your own evil habits, to destroy some sin, or to obtain some Christian grace? Never set about it as if you had power of your own to accomplish the work. This would be making the weapons of your warfare carnal. But rather throw yourself simply on God, and ask Him to work with. you, and in you, by his Almighty power.

Such are the directions that I would give you. And may God enable you to act upon them, and thus to do greater things than you have ever yet done in His name!

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE, A LIFE OF JOY.

WE know, all of us I suppose, what joy is; and we have all tasted it in some shape or other. Who is there that cannot call to mind some event in his past life, when he was for a time unusually happy, and his heart was filled with joy? But observe, this may be, without there being a spark of religion in our souls. For the joy I am speaking of is a mere natural joy—mere earthly joy—it is quite different from that higher joy which is so often spoken of in Scripture.

I have sometimes heard people say, that there is no joy but in religion. If they mean there is no true joy, no lasting joy, then I agree with them. But if they mean that the unconverted man can never feel happy, I think that they are mistaken. For there is a joy which the world gives, and which perhaps you and I have often felt; and it is

folly to deny it. Why, David draws a picture of earthly happiness, even in the case of an ungodly man, when he describes him as "prospering in the world," and "spreading himself like a green bay tree."

I think that it will be useful to us, and interesting also, first to trace some of the peculiar features which mark the Christian's joy, and then show its difference from worldly joy.

1. Spiritual joy *comes direct from God*. He alone can give it.

The happiness of worldly persons comes from what is around them. If their circumstances in life are prosperous, they are happy. If they enjoy health, and freedom from pain and anxiety; if they meet with no opposition or unkindness; if all goes smoothly; then they are happy, it may be.

But the Christian's happiness is not bound up in these things. It is not accidental happiness. It does not depend on circumstances. But it comes straight from God. It is His blessed gift to His own people. It is spoken of as "the joy of the Lord." Christ calls it "*His* joy, *His* peace."

This was His farewell legacy to His people, "peace I leave with you; *my* peace I give unto you;" and, again, "These things have I spoken unto you that *my* joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full."

And yet we are almost surprised to hear Christ speaking of *His* joy. For was He not a "man of sorrows?" Was not His life one of toil and tears! Where then is the joy of which He speaks, and which He prays that we may have as our portion? Are burdens, insults, sorrows, persecutions, crucifixions, joys?

Truly He was "acquainted with grief," as regards His outward condition. But there was within a deep well of love and joy which never failed. He delighted in His suffering errand. It is true, He was often grieved at the hardness of men's hearts. It is true, He was sometimes hungry, and thirsty, and weary; but He had "meat to eat," which men knew not of.

And so it is with His people. He calls upon them to cut off right hands, and pluck out right eyes, and deny and crucify themselves, and be poor in spirit, and bear the cross after Him. And what joy, it may be

asked, is there in this? How can the Christian Life be called a life of joy? Ah, but there is such a thing as "dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." The Christian can look up, and thank God that there is in his soul a fountain of peace, of which God Himself is the spring. It comes from Him. He is the Author and Giver of it.

2. Spiritual joy *has God for its object*. Not only is He the bestower of it, but He is the great *object* of the Believer's delight.

We are disposed to look here, and there, and everywhere for happiness. Like the restless Bee, we try one flower after another. But never can we say of any earthly thing, "Here will I dwell. Here I find that which satisfies me."

Very different is it with the Christian. He too, perhaps, has made many a fruitless search; but he has found peace at last. He has found it in Christ. He rests his weary soul in the Saviour's bosom, and he is happy. He feels, "They may take away my worldly goods. My friends may forsake me.

They may persecute me, bear false witness against me, take away my character. But they cannot rob me of my blessed hope; they cannot part me from my Saviour."

If, then, you ever feel uncomfortable and restless, do not imagine that you would be better anywhere else than where you are, or better under any other circumstances. Do not pitch upon this or that object, and fancy that if you had it, it would bring you happiness. Do not say, "Who will show me any good?" but rather say, "Lord, lift *Thou* up the light of Thy countenance upon me." Look upwards to Him, from whom alone real peace comes, "that so among the sundry and manifold changes of the world your heart may surely there be fixed, where true joys are to be found."

It may happen sometimes that you open your Bible, and get little or no good. You may turn to religious friends, but there is no comfort there. You may even come to God's house, and find it but a barren wilderness. But go to God Himself. Go to the Saviour. Rest your soul upon Him; and you are sure to find peace. "I will go," said the Psalmist, "unto the altar of God,

unto God, my exceeding joy." Christ is "our peace." "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul."

3. This spiritual joy *lasts*. Can this be said of earthly joy? No, we may have it to-day; but we cannot reckon upon it to-morrow. It is like the summer's sun, which often disappears as soon as we begin to bask in its warmth. Our mind is bent on it for weeks and months. At last we obtain it, and our heart is content. But how long does it remain? Perhaps it is soon taken away again. Or, if it remains, we discover that it does not give us the pleasure we expected. And then we turn to something else, in the hope of finding enjoyment in it.

But the joy we are now speaking of, when once it enters the soul, remains there. We can reckon upon it as our own. Yes, once gain this prize, and it becomes yours. It may for a time be damped, and smothered in the soul; but there it is, planted there by the hand of God Himself. Satan may disturb it now and then. Sometimes it is so weak within us, that it is hardly felt. But nothing can steal it away from that

heart which God has blest. "Your joy no man taketh from you."

4. It is *unselfish*. Worldly joy, on the other hand, too often has self for its centre. What flatters, and pleases, and exhorts self, is what alone rejoices the worldly heart. But the Christian's joy has its centre in God. He finds delight in God's service. He rejoices when God is honored. And he takes pleasure, too, in the welfare and happiness of others.

The Saviour seems to have found *His* chief joy in doing good, in relieving the sick, in comforting the mourner, and in saving souls. And we are told that a thrill of delight is felt by the very host of heaven when a lost sheep is received, and brought home to the fold. Such, too, is the Christian's joy. It is unselfish. To see his Father honored—to see his fellow-men saved and happy—this brings the purest joy to his soul.

5. A fifth feature in this joy is that it *depends but little on outward things*.

Think of those who lived in the days of the Apostles. There was everything in their case to cast them down. All out-

ward things were against them. But there was that within them which enabled them to rejoice in their tribulation. Instead of being filled with alarm and sadness, they were "filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost." So it was in all their persecutions; they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the Saviour's name. See how they bore their troubles at Philippi. What do we hear under those prison walls? Is it the dismal sound of moaning and distress? No, we hear amid the clank of chains the voice of joy and gladness, the song of thankfulness and praise. Again, it is said of others, that "they took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing in themselves that they had in heaven a better and an enduring substance." Think of the Martyrs, too, who in later times suffered so nobly, so patiently, so cheerfully, for Christ's sake. They welcomed the very flames that took away their lives. How was this? Were they not filled with a joy from heaven, which man could not take from them?

And I would ask you if you know what Christian joy is? When have you felt hap-

piest? When have you drunk deepest of this heavenly joy? Not perhaps when prosperity has shone full upon you; but in some hour of trial, when the world was nothing to you, but God was everything. Then you felt the Saviour near you; you saw religion to be a real thing; your heart leapt with joy; you experienced a happiness which you cannot describe.

6. Once more. This joy is often *most felt in the hour of death.*

How remarkable! For then it is that our earthly joys utterly fail us. When the worldling is forced to part with his friends, and his possessions—when life is ebbing fast—what is left for him? Alas! nothing. Oh, what a gloomy prospect! No wonder that such persons should look upon Death as “the king of terrors,” and should shrink from the very thought of it.

But how is it with one who knows and loves Christ? There is a peace and joy in his soul, which neither sickness, nor pain, nor even death, can weaken. He is happy; for he “knows whom he has believed.” He feels that he is near his home, that he is soon going to “enter into the joy of his Lord.”

If we could have stood by St. Peter, or St. Paul, or St. Stephen, or "the disciple whom Jesus loved," in their dying hour, I suppose we should have found them happy, very happy in the love of Christ, in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, in the hope of heaven.

But are true Christians, then, *always* happy in a dying hour? No, I think not—not *always*. They have enough to make them happy. They have the spring of joy within them. But the waters do not always flow. The brightest Christian is not without his trials; and sometimes his bitterest trials, his darkest days, come at the close. *Sometimes*—we know not why—but *sometimes* the Christian's evening is stormy and overcast. It seems as if the Saviour were no longer near him. The peace he once felt is gone, when he most desires to have it. But *has* the Saviour left His servant? *Is* his joy forfeited? Oh, no. That loving Friend is by his side, though he knows it not, and is ready to fill his soul with a full flood of joy, if not now, at all events when it takes its happy flight from this earthly prison.

Let our prayer be that the close of *our*

life may be peaceful and joyous. But if God should, for some wise reason, deny us this, still let us remember that "light is sown for the righteous," and that, although "weeping may endure for a night," joy is sure to "come in the morning."

We have seen then that this joy is the Christian's portion. It belongs to us, if we are God's people. I do not say that we shall *always* have it. I do not say that one Christian partakes of it as richly as another. No, a hundred things may hinder the feeling of joy in our hearts. But seek for it. Pray that it may be yours. The Christian Life ought to be a happy life. And if it is not so with us, then most likely there is something wrong. It ought, I say, to be a most happy life; for what are the stages in it? There is *the joy of Conversion*, the happy feeling of being brought nigh to God. There is *the joy of Forgiveness*; thus we pray, "Grant, merciful Lord, to Thy faithful people *pardon and peace*." There is *the joy of Adoption*, the feeling that He is our Father and our Friend. There is *the joy of Faith*, "joy and peace in believing." There

is *the joy of an humble child-like Trust*, knowing that we are in His safe hands. There is *the joy of a Holy Walk* with God. I will say nothing now of "the joy that is *set before us*," of that "fulness of joy" which is at God's right hand, and of those pleasures which "are for evermore."

When I speak of the Christian's life being a happy one, I do not mean merely that it leads to bliss *hereafter*, but that it is a happy life *now*. Let us then "lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees." Let us not live as bond-slaves, but as the Lord's freemen. Let us not be always sighing as we journey heavenward; but let us "go on our way rejoicing." May God's promise be abundantly fulfilled to us, "The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IN HEAVEN.

FIFTY years hence, where shall you and I be? We shall probably have passed away from this world. Our places will be filled by others. Our houses will be occupied by other tenants. Another set of faces will be seen in our village or our town.

Where shall we be? In our graves, you will say. Yes, our *bodies* will be there, but not our *souls*. They can never die. They are immortal. Those who have lived here without God, and without hope, will be living still without Him, and hopelessly banished from His presence. But those of us who have been living that Christian life—that spiritual life—of which I have spoken so often in the foregoing chapters—they will be still living that very same life which was begun here, but which will then be perfect and unbroken through eternity.

The Christian Life in Heaven—this is the closing subject of my Book.

O my God, if no good has been received from any of these chapters, bless *this* at least to the Reader. Or, if Thou hast made them useful to any one, oh grant a *double* blessing to these remaining words.

I shall speak of the Christian life in Heaven,

- I. As a life of Service.
- II. As a life of Holiness.
- III. As a life of Happiness.
- IV. As a life of a blessed Companionship.
- V. As a life of Endless Duration.

I. The Christian Life in Heaven is a life of *Service*.

When St. John speaks of the happy world above, he says, "There shall be no more curse ; but the throne of God and the Lamb shall be in it : and *His servants shall serve Him.*" Blessed be God, He allows us *now* to serve Him. If we are His people, our delight is to do His will. But oftentimes, when the spirit is willing, the flesh is sadly weak. Oftentimes we

grieve to think that our hands are so feeble, and our hearts so cold. Our zeal flags. Our desires are checked. We grow faint and weary in well-doing. But in heaven there will be no sins to hinder us, and no infirmities to weaken us.

Imagine what the service of *the Angels* must be. How readily and cheerfully they obey the summons of their Lord. Is there work to be done? Their language is, "Here am I, Lord, send me." Is there some relief to be given, some comfort to be carried, to one of God's suffering people? Their delight is to be the messengers and carriers of His mercy. "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation?" We know not *how* they help us; but they *do* help us: and not one is ever backward to perform his errand.

Now, this may give us some idea of the spirit in which our work will be done in heaven. We know not what that work will be; but this we know, that God will ever have some holy, happy work for His people to perform. We shall enter upon our rest; and yet *rest not day nor night.*

Our labors will be at an end ; and yet we shall *labor still*. There will be work to do in God's Church above. There will be a choir of heavenly singers ; and every voice and every heart will be in tune. There will be a glorious band of worshippers ; and their thoughts will never wander, or their devotions flag. We shall be employed to carry out God's will in ways that we have no idea of now. Some think that many of those glittering stars we see are filled with inhabitants. And perhaps God may have a message of mercy for us to carry to those worlds. Who knows? Who can say what blessed work the Lord may have in store for His gathered ones in heaven? This we know, that the Christian Life there will be one of *Service*.

II. It will also be a life of *Holiness*. God's command to us now is, "Be ye holy, for I am holy;" "Be ye followers of God as dear children;" "Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect." But how miserably small is the degree of holiness which any of us reach! There are times when we grow, like plants in the

garden of the Lord. We advance in grace, under the fostering care of the heavenly Husbandman. But how constantly is our growth checked. How often are our leaves withered, and our blossoms nipped. How often does the cold blast of temptation fall upon us, and drive us back from the point which we had gained. "Not, as though I had already attained, either were already perfect"—this is the constant complaint of the holiest Christian.

But in heaven it will be very different. We shall carry no body of sin with us there. Flesh and blood cannot enter there. There will be no more curse, no evil, no corruption, no infirmity, in that unfallen world. We shall all bear the image of God: we shall all be like Christ. Our love, which is now so feeble, will be strong. Our faith, which is now so mixed with unbelief, will be pure and perfect. Our humility, which is often so spoilt by the creeping in of pride, will be the humility of a lowly but rejoicing heart. To know the will of God, to feel that our wills are in complete harmony with His, and to be ever doing not our will, but God's—this will be our delight.

Tell me, are you not constantly made sad by the risings of a sinful nature within you? When you would do good, evil is present with you. Are you not often reminded that you are still a prisoner here, "tied and bound by the chain of your sins?" Ah, the prison-door will soon be thrown open. Your prison-dress will soon be laid aside. You will soon pass through the outer ward. You will soon breathe a purer air. You will soon gain your liberty, "the glorious liberty of the children of God." When the King comes in to see His guests, there will be none, not one, that has not on the wedding garment. "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." "They are without fault before the throne of God."

III. But let us think of the life in heaven as one of *Happiness*. Holiness and happiness are twins; they cannot be parted. Where there is holiness, there *must* be happiness.

There are many questions concerning heaven which we cannot answer. *Where*

will it be? We cannot tell you ; for God has not revealed it. It may be far away in some distant planet. It may be here in this very world of ours, purified and fitted for our eternal residence. *What shall we be like in heaven?* What language shall we speak ? We know not ; and never shall we know, till we reach our Father's presence. Never till then shall we know *where* heaven is, or *what* it is. Nor does it matter. For if God spared not His own Son to redeem us nothing will be wanting to make us supremely happy. The Home of the Redeemed, the House of "many mansions," the Palace of the Great King, has joys which eye hath never seen before, nor ear heard, and which it hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive.

Who can tell the blessedness of a ransomed soul when it reaches heaven ? We read that "to die is gain"—not *shall* be gain at some future time, after a certain delay—but to die *is* gain, immediate gain. There is but one step, and the soul is in glory. Before the sounds of mourning have subsided in the chamber of death, the song of the upper sanctuary has begun. There is

no delay—no waiting for an escort to conduct us along that untrodden path. On angels' wings, in angels' arms, Lazarus is borne to Abraham's bosom. The pardoned thief was *that day* "with Christ in paradise."

What makes God's people unhappy here on earth? What brings a cloud now and then over the brightness of our sunny life? What makes the rejoicing heart sometimes fall back into sadness. The presence of sin : but there shall be no more there. The assaults of the Tempter : but he cannot reach us there. Doubts and misgivings as to our acceptance : but there shall be no more then. The trials of life : but they will be ended. Affliction, pain, sickness : but these will be unknown.

There is another thing too which sometimes distresses us ; and that is our *ignorance*. There are some things in God's word which we cannot understand, and many of the dealings of His providence perplex us. Now we see but dimly, as through a glass ; but soon we shall see clearly. "Now I know in part, but then shall I know even as I am known."

Who can tell the exceeding joy of having

all cleared up; every mystery made plain; every tangled thread unravelled? What a blessed study will the past be—to look along the whole line that we have travelled since our birth, and not only to see how, step by step, the Lord has led us; but also *why* He led us in the way He did; why He thwarted our plans here, and made them succeed there; why He directed us to one place, rather than another; why He appeared to prosper us at one time, and to chasten us at another; why He sometimes seemed to be our Enemy, rather than our Friend. It will be joy indeed, when our minds are capable of taking all this in, when “we shall know even as we are known.”

But does not this tell us that there is a lesson for us now to learn? When you read God's Word, remember the feebleness of your knowledge, and that there are many depths which you cannot fathom. Be thankful for what is plain, and leave what is difficult to be cleared up in heaven. The Holy Spirit will meanwhile teach you all that you need to know, if you earnestly apply for His gracious help.

Try and feel the same too with regard to

the Lord's dealings with you. Be patient, O child of God; be submissive to thy Father's will. Accept His darkest dispensations cheerfully, thankfully, without a murmur. "Be still, and know that He is God." Wait a moment, and the shadows will flee away, and all will be clear. What thou knowest not now, "thou shalt know hereafter."

IV. Our life in heaven will be a life of *blessed Companionship*. "We shall be ever with the Lord"—not only under His care, as we are now—not merely near Him, as we may be even in this world—but actually *with* Him. This was His promise, "If any man serve me, let him follow me; *where I am, there shall my servant be.*" And this was His prayer: "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be *with me* where I am."

Happy were those who walked with Him along the plains of Galilee. Happy those who were His close companions when He dwelt among us. Happy those who shared His trials and His joys. Happy those who, like Mary, sat at His feet and heard His

words. We may well envy them. But we shall enjoy a yet higher privilege; we shall be *with Him* in His own kingdom.

But we shall have other companions. And who will they be? The angels, who have never sinned. The multitude too, whom no man can number, of God's saved ones, "having their Father's name written in their foreheads."

Such will be our companionship. Are we beginning to enjoy it now? Do we love the Saviour? Are His people dear to us? Are our hearts drawn towards them, the holier they are, the more heavenly-minded, the more Christ-like? Are our happiest hours those which we spend in the Lord's courts, and with His people? Then we have *already* something of heaven about us. We have *an earnest* of that inheritance which will one day be ours.

V. Once more: The Christian life in heaven will be one of *Endless Duration*. Everything about this world is fleeting, changing, temporary: everything about the future world is fixed, lasting, endless. "If the tree falls towards the south, or towards

the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be." Whatever portion is ours, it will be unchangeable, eternal. "He that is unjust" now will be "unjust still;" and "he who is filthy" now will be "filthy still;" and "he that is righteous" now will be "righteous still." Our state in the eternal world will never alter. The gnawing worm of conscience will never die: the fire of torment will never lose a particle of its heat. And so too the joys of heaven will be unceasing, always full and always new. The pleasures at Christ's right hand will be for evermore.

Oh, the littleness of all earthly things! What is pain for a few weeks or months? What are the pleasures which this world makes so much of? What are riches, and honors, and greatness? They are "but for a moment," compared with "an eternal weight of glory."

Learn, oh learn it in time—that everything here is quickly *passing away*, and that everything in heaven is *for ever*. To be for ever safe—for ever happy—to be for ever with those who have been our Christian brethren on earth—to meet them again,

never to be separated—to be ever with the Lord Himself—this will be our blessed portion, if we are Christ's.

But *are* we His? Have we “passed from death unto life?” Have we “washed our robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb?” Are we children of His household, and subjects of His kingdom? Is Heaven *already* begun in us? I have spoken of our life in heaven being one of *service*: are we delighting in the Lord's service *now*? I have spoken of it as a life of *holiness*: is ours a holy walk *now*? I have spoken of it too as a life of *happiness*: are we *already* happy in Christ? Have we found peace in Him? Our companionship will be with the Lord, and with His saints; are such our companions *now*?

It is a great mistake to look upon heaven merely as a place of reward, a sort of new life altogether different from this. No, it will be our present Christian Life carried on and perfected in a better world. It will be the transplanting of the fruitful tree to another and a richer soil. It will be the calling up of the faithful servant to a higher and more honored post.

And now I have been graciously permitted to carry out my purpose, and to finish this little Book. Both you and I must give an account of it. May we do it with joy and not with grief! May the Lord bless you, and make you a blessing to others! We shall only be a little while longer here. Oh, that our lives may be happy and useful! Oh, that our passage through this world may be a blessed one, and that we may shine hereafter "as the brightness of the firmament," and "as the stars for ever and ever!"



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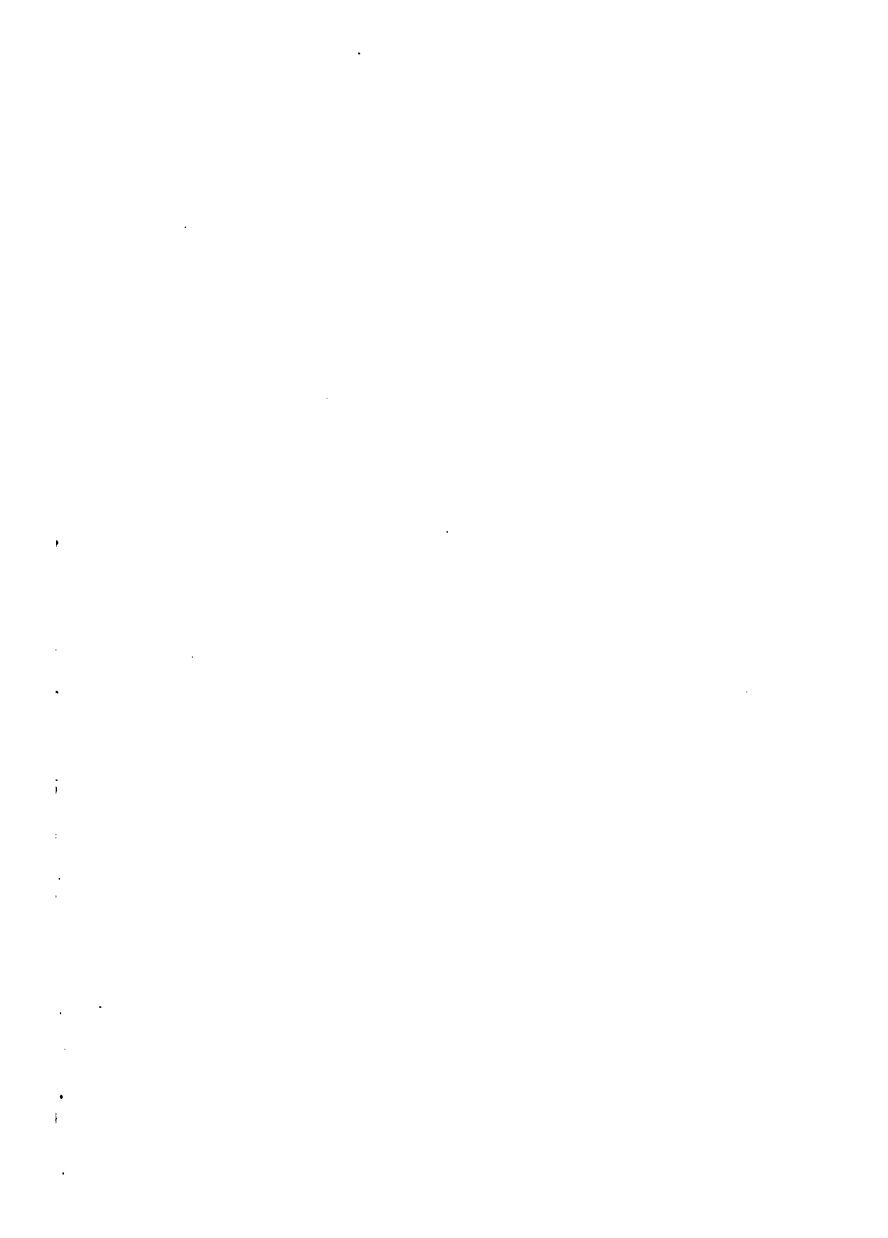
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